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IN THE REDEEMER'S FOOTSTEPS

L. S. KEYSER

WITHDRAWN

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IN THE REDEEMER'S FOOTSTEPS

WITHDRAWN

Sermons on the Gospel Lessons
for the Church Year

VOLUME I

From Advent to Pentecost

By

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"Election and Conversion," A System of Natural
Theism," "A System of General
Ethics," Etc.

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A BRIEF EXPLANATION.

A FEW words explaining why this book is issued will not be amiss. The Manager of The Lutheran Literary Board became convinced, by numerous requests that came to him, that two volumes of brief and simple sermons on the gospel pericopes of the Church Year would fill a real need at this particular time. He asked the author to prepare them. The author was at first loathe to undertake such a task, as he had much other work on hand for the summer, and was also seeing another book through the press. It seemed to be scarcely modest to issue two books so close together.

However, after much thought, he yielded to the Manager's urgent solicitation. Although the manuscript has been prepared under pressure, the subject-matter has not been hastily gathered and wrought out. It is the result of a life-time of study, thought and experience. The first volume, covering the gospel lessons from Advent to Pentecost, is herewith submitted. The second volume, treating the Trinity season, will probably appear next spring.

The author has not borrowed from others. There are scarcely a half dozen quotations, save from the Bible, in the entire book. Except in one or two cases, he has given his own interpretations of the Sacred Scriptures. He has also used his own homiletical method. There is little exhortation in the volume. A clear statement of the truth is the best exhortation. The writer's object has been to help and edify, not to disclose any learning.

The title expresses the chief purpose of the book—to follow "In the Redeemer's Footsteps." Christ *is* the Redeemer; by His active and passive obedience He ransomed us from the just consequences of our sins. Therefore it has been the author's purpose to show the vital connection of each gospel lesson with God's great and holy plan of saving grace. Every event in the Redeemer's life and every teach-

ing He uttered must have a real bearing on the central purpose of His incarnation and work: in other words, must be a link, or part of link, in the living chain.

Some unsigned articles, which have appeared from time to time in one of our church periodicals, have been reproduced here, in some cases *verbatim,* in others more or less revised. It is due to the author to say that those articles were all written by himself, at the request of the editor, who believed they would be profitable to his readers. This explanation is necessary to prevent misunderstanding.

The writer prays that these sermons may uplift and enrich the hearts of his readers, be they many or few.

L. S. K.

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I

THE FIRST SUNDAY IN ADVENT

HOW OUR HEAVENLY KING ENTERED AN EARTHLY CITY

Text: Matt. 21:1-9

In the beginning of the Advent season it is proper for us to dwell in thought on this inspiring theme, "How Our Heavenly King Entered an Earthly City." In the midst of our trials and the sins of the world, it seems for a little while to bring heaven and earth very near together.

All of us know, or should know, that the Advent season is the period which prepares us for the proper celebration of Christmas, which is the anniversary of our Redeemer's first advent into the world. The word "Advent" means *entrance* or *coming to* or *toward.* Hence in the Church Year it always means Christ's coming into this poor world of ours to enlighten and redeem it.

For the first Sunday in Advent this event—our Lord's triumphal entry into Jerusalem—has been selected as our lesson from the gospel. It is in some ways a strange incident in the earthly life of Christ, which was, for the most part, so humble, so utterly without ostentation. Just why did this particular event occur? What is its meaning? It surely must have a deep and vital significance, or it would not have taken place; for we cannot think that Jesus Christ, who came to the earth for so momentous a purpose as to redeem mankind, would engage in any act that was idle and frivolous. So we must first deal with this subject:

I. The Real Meaning of This Event.

1. It forms a beautiful connecting link between the first and second Advents of our Lord. At the first Advent He was "born King of the Jews;" but not of the Jews only, for the angel over Bethlehem's plains said to the shepherds:

"Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to *all people;* for unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord." Then a few people acknowledged Him as King. At the triumphal entry many more made this acknowledgement, and at the Second Advent "all people" will hail Him as Lord and King. At the First Advent the angels promised that He would bring "peace on earth, and good will among men." At the triumphal entry He rides upon an animal which is the symbol of peace, and moves in a peaceful processional. At the Second Advent, He, the Prince of Peace, will come into the world to bring eternal amity and good will, to establish peace in every heart, in every community and among all the nations of the earth. Thus we see that all the events of Christ's life are truly and organically related.

2. This signal even was also a foretaste of that happy time when "Jesus shall reign where'er the sun doth his successive journeys run;" when He shall be King indeed. You know about the three offices of Christ—Prophet, Priest and King. As our Teacher He is Prophet; as our Sacrifice and Intercessor He is Priest; as our Ruler He is King. Was it not meet and right that His poor disciples, who had followed Him through so many trials and persecutions, should have a foretaste of that happy time when their King's rule would be supreme? Would not such an experience give them heart in the dark times that were to come, and that, as we know, did come into their lives? In such trying times they would say: "Oh, well, we can bear our afflictions for a little while, for did we not 'taste of the powers of the world to come' when we followed our Lord in His triumphal march into Jerusalem? How we forget all our sorrows in the great joy of that occasion!"

And this event may have the same value for us today. We see how Jesus for the time completely swayed the multitude, and won their homage and praise, and silenced all His enemies; and all of it without any appeal to force or to arms; just by the pure winsomeness of love and spiritual power. As it was the fulfillment of a prophecy (Isaiah and

Zechariah), so it was a prophecy itself—a prophecy of the time when Christ, our King, shall "have put all enemies under His feet," and shall reign in peace and righteousness forevermore.

3. This event is also a prediction and foretaste of the character of Christ's rule over the hearts of men. How free and spontaneous were the actions and praises of the people! There was nothing forced or strained about them. So far as the record indicates, there was the least possible preparation for the occasion; there is no evidence that a definite program was made beforehand. The disciples were simply told to bring the young animal for the Master to ride upon—that was all. Then when the ass and colt were brought, the disciples put their garments on them, and Christ mounted the younger of the two animals, and the procession was started.

Really the procedure was remarkable. There was so little of it, and yet so much; so great a demonstration, and yet so little apparent cause back of it. What made the whole multitude spread their garments in the road, gather palm branches from the wayside, scatter them before the Master, and break into hosannas, as if a great king were having a triumphal march after a notable campaign of victory over his enemies? Christ did not command them to do this. He was the meek and lowly Nazarene; He had never sought public display, and prior to that day had always avoided being regarded as a king. The incident stands out alone and unique even in the life of Christ. It was His first and His last pageant during His earthly career. History records many notable processions, but this is the most remarkable of them all. When you remember how elaborate must be our preparations for every public exercise or demonstration, you cannot help wondering at the purely spontaneous way in which this pageant arose. How will you account for it? The only adequate explanation is that the Spirit of God moved the hearts of Christ's disciples, and constrained them by the simple propulsion of love to give Him this ovation.

That was one of the great purposes of the event, namely,

to show us what heaven will be like; what will be the character of the millenial time; how free and happy will be our worship and praise. There will be no toilsomely prepared programs in heaven, nor in that glad time when there shall be "new heavens and a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness." All will be free, full, joyous and spontaneous.

II. Some Useful Lessons to Be Derived From This Event.

1. All we are and have belongs to the Lord. He claimed the little beast and her foal. When He needed them, they were not withheld from Him. The people's garments were given up to Him, and so were the branches that the people plucked from the wayside trees. Then their hosannas belonged to Him. Thus we see that all we have and are belongs to our Master and Lord, and we should withhold nothing from Him. And especially should we give Him ourselves. "My son, give me thy heart," is His gracious and loving plea.

2. Strange as it may seem, the Lord has *need* of us and our possessions. "If any man shall say aught unto you, ye shall say, 'The Master hath *need* of them.' " How can that be—that the King of heaven and earth has need of us and of our poor services? Nay, do not question His marvellous ways. He has ordained for our good that we should be His helpers in bringing the world to confess His Kingship. The apostle says, "We are laborers together with God" (1 Cor. 3:9). We are His *junior partners* in the great work of evangelizing the world. He might do all this work Himself, but that is not His way; nor would it be the best way; for then we, His people, would miss all the discipline, all the blessing and joy of working with and for Him. Do you not believe that afterwards the disciple who owned the ass and her colt often told his fellow-disciples with joy that he had contributed them to that triumphal procession?

3. Obedience is a good thing. How promptly the disciples went for the little beasts at their Master's request! They did not know why He wanted them. Yet they did not hesitate. Neither did the owner make any demur when he

learned that "the Master had need of them." How beautiful is prompt obedience! Said Samuel to Saul, "To obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams." When the Lord commands, let us do the very thing He commands, and not, like Saul, something else that we would prefer to do.

4. To praise and worship our Lord is good and joy-giving. On that great day of the triumphal entry into Jerusalem the people that went before, and the people that followed, gave great acclaim to Christ, and shouted and sang: "Hosanna to the Son of David: Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest!"

What beautiful praise it was! It was pure, objective worship; it thought only of Christ and His love and greatness; it sought only to honor Him; it was not mingled with any selfish subjective feelings. The people were so absorbed in singing praises to Jesus that they forgot themselves. They never asked the question, "Do I love my Lord or no? Am I His or am I not?" No! no! they forgot themselves in their worship.

It was the kind of worship which we give to God in our churches when we sing "Gloria Patri" and "Gloria in Excelsis." No one will deny that there should be some subjective elements in our worship; but there should be a great deal more of the purely objective element. We worship best, and we really are the happiest, too, when we forget ourselves in ascribing heartfelt worship to God. Try the experiment on your own heart. When you sing such a hymn as this, "More love to Thee, O Christ, more love to Thee," you cannot help feeling more or less of a strain, and often the more you try to control your feelings, the less you can succeed; but suppose you change your hymn to this one: "Joy to the world, the Lord has come; Let earth receive her King," and note what a joy and uplift come into your experience.

5. The *children* had a part in the blessed service of that triumphant day. How beautiful and appropriate! The chief priests and scribes were filled with indignation when

they heard the children crying "Hosanna" in the temple, and they censured Christ for permitting it; but He replied: "Yea: did ye never read, Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings thou hast perfected praise?"

The acclamations of the children on that first Palm Sunday were a foretaste and forecast of the time when all God's children will give Him free and acceptable worship, and confess Him Lord of all. How natural and glad their hearts were! And we do not believe we are going too far when we say that this event was a prophecy of what occurs even today in many Christian churches, especially our Lutheran churches, when on Palm Sunday the children, who have learned to know, trust and love Christ through proper instruction and the witness of the Holy Spirit, come to the altar of the church to worship their Lord and to confirm their solemn baptismal vows. In these happy festivities the prophecy of the first Palm Sunday is partly fulfilled.

Let us all, young and old alike, fulfill it more and more as the years go by, so that we may have a share in the complete fulfillment when Christ, at His Second Advent, shall come as "King of kings and Lord of lords."

II

THE SECOND SUNDAY IN ADVENT

WHEN CHRIST COMES AGAIN

Text: Luke 21:25-36

Few doctrines are more clearly and more frequently set forth in the New Testament than the doctrine of Christ's Second Coming. Indeed, if there were to be no Second Advent, the First Advent would have had little value and significance; for the purpose of the first must be consummated in the second. God's redeeming plan will not be left like a castle in the air; He will complete it as sure as His Word is true and everlasting.

The gospel for the second Sunday in Advent is somewhat difficult to interpret in every respect. Most students of the Bible think that the prophecies concerning the destruction of Jerusalem and those of the end of the world are so combined that we cannot always distinguish between them. The Lutheran Commentary contends that the verses preceding the text relate to the former of these events, while the text itself relates to the latter. This would seem to be correct, for there are evidently some things predicted in the text that have not yet been fulfilled. Here we will not enter into a discussion of these difficulties, but refer the reader to the learned commentaries. Our purpose is more practical. One thing may be said here that we think is relevant: we can never clearly interpret prophecy until it is fulfilled; only then is it perfectly plain. If it could be certainly understood prior to its fulfillment, evil men and evil spirits might seek to circumvent the divine purpose. Let us look at our text and note:

I. The Signs of Christ's Second Coming.

Some of these signs pertain to the universe itself: "There shall be signs in the sun and moon and stars," and

"the powers of the heavens shall be shaken." These facts have a wide significance, for they prove that Christ's work of redemption has to do with the whole cosmos. As Paul says (Rom. 8:18-24), the whole creation is groaning and waiting for redemption just as God's people are, and it and they will be delivered from their bondage at the last day. Just as all nature was darkened and convulsed in sympathy with its suffering Lord and King at the time of the crucifixion, so at the last judgment all nature will share in His triumph and glory. God's plan of redeeming grace is not a small one; it includes a cosmical restoration. That is why the planets will be affected, or, as the text phrases it, "the powers of the heavens shall be shaken," when Christ comes to glorify the universe and judge the nations.

As that event draws near, there will be premonitions of fear among the people—as the text says, "distress of nations," "perplexity," "men fainting for fear and for expectation of the things which are coming on the world." On account of all the portentous signs, there will be a feeling of uneasiness among men. That is one reason why so many people now-a-days, in the midst of the great conflict of the nations at war, have the presentiment that the end is at hand and that the Lord will not delay His coming. However, God's children need not fear, for they may hear the voice of Jesus speaking to them in reassuring tones in this gospel lesson: "But when these things begin to come to pass, look up, and lift up your heads; because your redemption draweth nigh." Then He teaches a beautiful lesson from "the fig tree and all the trees;" when they begin to put forth their leaves, we may know that the summer is at hand; so we may know that "the kingdom of God is nigh" when we see all these portents in the heavens and upon the earth.

But some troubled soul may say, "There have always been some of these promised signs of the end of the world, and so we can never be sure of the precise time." Yes; and no doubt it is God's purpose to have it so, for He wants every age and all people always to be waiting and watching for

His coming, so that they will not grow careless. Even some of the apostles expected Christ's speedy return; and so it has been in every age since their day. The Second Advent is always imminent so that men may always be on the alert. And now we must draw a contrast.

II. How the Second Advent Will Differ From the First Advent.

1. Our blessed Redeemer came the first time in weakness. Though He was God, yet, for the time being, He laid aside the exercise of His power, and became a weak little babe, lying in Bethlehem's manger. Had not the Father taken care of Him, how easily His little life might have been crushed out! Herod sought to kill Him, and so God had to direct His parents to hurry with their precious babe into Egypt for safety.

But when He comes again, He will come in all the fullness of His divine power, and the wicked nations shall flee from Him, and shall call on the hills to fall on them and hide them from His face. What a contrast that will be! Even while here on earth as an ordinary man apparently, He really had all authority in heaven and on earth; He simply refrained from using them; but at His second coming, He will exercise and assert His omnipotence, and nothing shall be able to withstand Him.

2. At our Lord's first coming He appeared in very lowly guise. Born of a humble virgin, laid in a manger for a cradle, His reputed father a common carpenter, there was no mark of earthly grandeur and royalty about His First Advent. While the angels of heaven heralded Him, and some humble shepherds and a few sages from the east came to do Him homage, the great ones of the earth knew nothing of His nativity. Think of the Potentate, not of an earthly kingdom, but of all earth and all heaven, coming in so lowly a form!

But very different will be His Second Advent. Our text says, "And then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory." Another gospel (Matt.

31:32) says: "But when the Son of man shall come in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then shall He sit on the throne of His glory; and before Him shall be gathered all the nations; and He shall separate them one from another, as the shepherd separateth the sheep from the goats." No longer will His glory be veiled. During His earthly life of humiliation His humanity was like a curtain concealing His divinity, so that poor, weak human eyes could bear to look upon Him; but when He comes again in His state of exaltation, His divinity will have glorified His humanity, and He shall appear in all the radiancy of the Sun of righteousness.

3. Once more, our Lord's first coming was for the purpose of *saving* the world. "The Son of man came to seek and to save that which was lost." (See also John 3:16, 17.) But when He comes again, it will be to *judge* the world. He who was once the world's Redeemer will then be the world's Judge. Then only those who have accepted Him as their Saviour will escape the condemnation of the great and eternal Arbiter of men's destinies. How important it will be to have the Judge in the last great assize as our Friend and Advocate! This thought leads us to our next consideration:

III. Admonitions to be Ready for Christ's Second Coming.

How solemn and urgent are Christ's warnings in this gospel (verses 34-36): "But take heed to yourselves, lest perchance your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness and cares of this life, and that day come on you suddenly as a snare; for so shall it come upon all them that dwell upon the face of the earth. But watch ye at every season, making supplication, that ye may prevail to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man."

Here we learn that, while there will be signs of the Parousia—that is, the Second Coming—they will not be so unmistakable as to preclude the need of constant readiness. After all, the hour will strike when we are not expecting it. Jesus Himself said that no man, nor the angels of heaven,

nor even the Son of man Himself during His voluntary humiliation, knew just when the end would come. It is best so. Otherwise we might grow negligent. We might become like the wicked servant who said, "My Lord delayeth His coming" (Luke 12:45), and so indulged in all kinds of evil conduct; and then his lord "shall come in a day when he expecteth not, and in an hour when he knoweth not," to mete out to him a terrible condign punishment. So our Lord has not told us at which watch He will come, but He has told us plainly and repeatedly to "watch and pray" and always to be ready for His coming. "Blessed are those servants whom the Lord, when He cometh, shall find watching: verily I say unto you, He shall gird Himself, and make them sit down to meat, and shall come and serve them. And if He shall come in the second watch, or if in the third, and shall find them so, blessed are those servants."

And now what is the best way to watch and to be ready? It is not to spend a great deal of time in trying to figure out the day or the hour of the Parousia, as the Millerites, Russellites and Second Advent people do. They might spend their time more profitably; for Christ Himself declared that no man knoweth the hour of His coming. Nor is it necessary to remain awake at night to watch; nor should we do as the Millerites did far back in the preceding century—dress ourselves in white robes, and go out upon a high hilltop to watch for Christ's appearance in the clouds. They were sorely disappointed when He did not come, and many of them lost faith altogether. They should not have tried to be wiser than Christ and the Bible, which have said plainly, "No man knoweth the hour."

No, this is not the best way to be prepared for the great assize of the world. The best way is, first, to accept Christ by faith as our Saviour, and thus be justified, freed from the condemnation of the law, regenerated by the Holy Spirit through the Word; and then do His will, proving our faith by our works. And how can we best engage in His service? By attending faithfully to our every-day work in His fear, working either with our hands or our brains in some good,

honorable and useful employment, attending faithfully on the means of grace in the Church, giving to the extension of Christ's cause, and telling as many people as we can about Christ and His great love and redemption. That will be true "watching." Then, no matter when Christ comes, He will not take us unawares, nor find us unprepared. Suppose He should come some day when you are working in the field, or in the house, or in the shop, or in the office or the study, or any place to which your duty calls you, do not think He will be offended? Do not think He will condemn you? No, if you are pursuing your rightful calling in His fear when He comes, He will say to you, "Well done, good and faithful servant; enter into the joy of thy Lord." Ah! brother, just so you and I trust Him, and Him alone for our salvation, and do His will through His grace, we shall never be found unready. If it should be on the Lord's Day, and we are in His house, well will it be with us. If it should be on any other day, and we are engaged in good and useful employment, then, too, it will be well with us.

And what a comfort and inspiration it is to the Christian soul that there is *going to be* a general judgment—a time when all wrongs will be made right; when even-handed justice shall be done everywhere; when all the inequalities of the world will be adjusted; when, as the Bible puts it, "there shall be new heavens and a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness!" How depleting it would be to faith and endeavor to think that the same unequal way of the present age would continue forever! No, no, the judgment day *must* come to inaugurate the *Golden Age* in which love, holiness and joy will prevail throughout the endless cycles!

III

THE THIRD SUNDAY IN ADVENT

MARKS OF THE TRUE MESSIAH

Text: Matt. 11:2-10

It is rather a curious and interesting question than a profitable one as to whether John the Baptist had fallen into doubt about Christ or not. Many people have a desire to exonerate John from such weakness. After he had baptized Christ and had borne such clear testimony regarding His identity, it is difficult to believe that, when trials came, he would succumb to real serious doubt. Dr. Charles F. Schaeffer, in the Lutheran Commentary, takes the position that John himself did not fall into doubt, but that some of his disciples did, and so the Baptist sent them directly to Christ to have their skepticism cleared away. If that is the true interpretation, it would explain the strong witness that Christ afterward bore to the greatness and firmness of the Baptist. Dr. David Smith, in his commentary on Matthew, assumes that John's doubts were real, because, as he says, "The works of Jesus were such as the Messiah should perform, but they were, in John's judgment, insufficient. He expected that the Messiah would be (1) a Reformer (3:12) and (2) a Sufferer, a Sacrificial Victim (John 1:29). But Jesus was neither. He was not striving, nor crying aloud, neither did any hear His voice in the streets (12:19); and He was at that stage the hero of the multitude. Could He be the Messiah? Had John been misled when he hailed Him as the Messiah at the Jordan?"

If this is the true view, we may learn from it that even good and strong men will have their seasons of doubt; that willful skeptics are not the only persons who know the testing and distress of doubt; and that the real way to have our doubts removed is to go directly to Christ Himself with them; then, just as in John's case, our faith will be restored.

Even if John himself was not in doubt, but sent his troubled disciples to Christ for their own benefit, we may still learn the above useful lessons from the incident.

However, the state of John's mind and the feelings of his disciples are not the real point in our gospel for the third Sunday in the Advent season. The real question is, What are the marks of the true Messiah? At His first Advent He came as a little child; then He grew up as other human beings do, and at thirty years of age was baptized by John and began His public ministry. Now, did Jesus give sure proof that He was the Redeemer of the world? That is the salient question of our text. Therefore let us consider together:

I. The Marks of the True Messiah.

In solving this problem we must try to answer the question which John commissioned his disciples to ask Jesus, "Art thou He that cometh, or look we for another?" Jesus Himself answered John's question in the most effective way. He said to John's disciples: "Go and tell John the things which ye hear and see." Then He gives a list of the true marks of His Messiahship. What are they?

1. *The beneficent miracles He wrought.*

So far as Christ was concerned, He had no question about the miraculous element in God's dealings with the world. He had no disposition to eliminate the supernatural, and to reduce everything to "the uniform laws of nature." He did not think that God was helpless in the presence of the machine of His universe, or that He had gotten caught in its cogs and wheels; but He believed and knew that God was the complete master of the creation, was transcendent to it as well as immanent in it, and therefore could at will introduce something new into its operations. Let no one think that a true divine miracle is something "contrary to the laws of nature," as many superficial and would-be scientific people seem to suppose. No, a true miracle is not *anti-natural,* but *super-natural;* not a *violation,* but a *modification,* of natural law. Just as a master-mechanic can

introduce a new factor into a machine that he has contrived, so God can, when He wills so to do, add a new force or element into the mechanism of the universe which He has created. If He could not do that, He would not be all-powerful. Think of the logic of men who believe that God could *create* the universe, and then could not perform a miracle in the mechanism of it!

But we cannot here discuss the general subject of miracles. However, in this connection we would like to recommend a great and convincing book on the subject—Dr. Johannes Wendland's "Miracles and Christianity," which has been translated into English and can now be bought at a nominal price. This masterly work ought to convince any mind that is receptive of the truth. It is now time to note the miraculous works which Jesus wrought and to which He appealed as the signs of His Messiahship.

"The blind receive their sight." Jesus had healed a man who was born blind. Could any one but a Divine Being do that simply by His own power? Sometimes in these latter days very skillful surgeons may cure serious optical defects, but they must use the most painful efforts and the most scientific instruments and must take a long time, and even then they can never be sure of a successful operation. Not so with Jesus, who used no instruments, but who simply spake the word, and it was done. Was not this a mark of a superhuman Being—that is, of the Messiah?

"The lame walk." Jesus could point the disciples of John to concrete cases of men right before them who had always been lame, and who had never walked in their lives, but who now were walking about completely healed of their infirmities. In those days no surgical skill was known that could perform such a cure. But Jesus simply spoke the word, and the lame and the halt leaped to their feet and walked away rejoicing. Was not that a sign-manual of His Messiahship?

"The deaf hear." What is sadder than deafness? And no diseases are harder to cure, so delicate and complex is the mechanism of the ear. Today a surgeon who under-

takes an operation on that organ must have gone through the college, the medical university, and then the technical school that specializes on diseases of the ear. He must understand the anatomy and physiology of the ear. Even with all his knowledge and skill as a specialist he often fails. But Jesus never failed to cure any auditory trouble that was brought to Him. When did He study anatomy? When did He learn about the marvellous structure of the ear? We know that He never went to a medical college. Then how did He cure diseases of the auditory organs? Ah! He was the Messiah; He was "that One who should come;" He was the God-man. As God He had made the ear, and therefore knew how to repair it.

But Christ appealed to the greatest of His physical miracles to convince John's troubled disciples: "The dead are raised up." Perhaps He referred to the restoration of the son of the widow of Nain. Here is a marvel that has thus far in the world's history, in spite of all its advancement and expertness, defied the skill of man—to raise the dead. To put life where there is no life is beyond the power of man. All the scientists of the world have never been able to bridge the gulf between the living and the non-living. The law of biogenesis—that is, of life only from antecedent life—prevails everywhere. But Christ raised the dead to life. That is incontestible proof of His divine character, for the God who created life, He alone can restore life. What greater and more convincing evidence could John and his disciples ask? No wonder they never questioned Christ's Messiahship again! They found that they had no need to "look for another." But Christ furnished one more proof to his distressed questioners:

2. *The spiritual benefaction He brought.*

"The poor have the gospel preached unto them." Crass and earthly people are always wanting physical wonders to convince them. Many unbelievers and liberalists today are crying for miracles in the outer world. They are like the Jews of old, who said, "What sign showest thou?" It is to be noted that, whenever people in Christ's earthly days came

to Him in that skeptical and challenging frame of mind, He performed no miracles for them. Why not? Because His kingdom is, above all, an ethical and spiritual kingdom, and therefore He would not force conviction on proud and defiant minds by external signs and unspiritual means. No; to them He said, "You must first become *poor*"—that is, "poor in spirit"—before you can "see the kingdom of God."

The greatest, the most cogent and most convincing proof of Christ's Messianic office and appointment was that those who are poor in both purse and spirit "have the gospel preached to them." And that is the best proof to us today. As Paul declared, "The gospel is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth." To be converted, to be forgiven of sin, to be cleansed from sin's defilement, to be delivered from sin's enthrallment, and to be saved from its penal consequences—ah! that is the crowning miracle, the ultimate and indisputable proof that Christ is the Redeemer. Said the angel of the enunciation to Joseph, "And thou shalt call His name Jesus, for He shall save His people from their sins." He who has experienced this inner miracle needs no outer miracle to assure Him that Jesus is the Christ of God; that He is Immanuel, God with us; that He is God manifest in the flesh. Outer miracles were intended for a special age and purpose—that is, to prove once for all to the needy world that Christ was He "that should come," as foretold by prophecy—but the inner miracle of regeneration is to abide forever, the convincing demonstration that Jesus Christ is "the power of God and the wisdom of God," and that all men may have life through believing on Him. Even if the Baptist and his disciples needed something more in their day to assure them, we, of today, who are living in the dispensation of the Holy Spirit, have need of no more; for the Spirit testifies of Christ and His divine character, and "beareth witness with our spirits that we are the children of God." This leads us logically to our next main point:

II. The Blessedness of Faith in Christ.

After naming the signs of His Messiahship to John's disciples, Jesus added the admonition: "And blessed is he,

whoever is not offended in me." The word "whoever" is put in for emphasis, and means "whoever he may be," so as to include all doubters in every place and every age. The original word for "offended" is the Greek word from which we derive our English word "scandalize." So we are never to be *scandalized* on account of Christ, never to doubt Him, never to stumble over anything He may say, or do, or not do.

You see, it was as if He should say to John and His disciples: "I may not do everything you are expecting of me, and I may do many things that you do not expect; but do not be offended, do not doubt me, for my thoughts are not your thoughts and my ways are not your ways." Yes, Jesus wants us to trust Him. If we could understand everything He did during His earthly life, and everything He does now in His state of glorification, we would have no room for faith. Is it not plain that perfect knowledge would do away with the element of trust? Yet Christ wants us to "walk by faith, not by sight." He inspired His apostle to say that we are "justified by faith." He never once in all the Bible says that we shall be justified by knowledge. Of salvation His apostle said, "It is by faith that it might be by grace." In the eleventh chapter of Hebrews—the great faith chapter of the Bible—all the heroes mentioned performed their great works "by faith," not by their superior knowledge. "Without faith," says the inspired writer, "it is impossible to please Him."

Does not reason teach us that it is far better to trust in Christ than to let go our faith in Him because we cannot understand many of His ways? If we lose faith in Him, *to whom shall we go?* Is there any one else who has the words of eternal life? Are we going to trust merely in chance, or fate, or the immutable laws of nature, or the blind god of pantheism? How can they help us? They cannot even help themselves. We cannot pray to them, and they can give us no comfort in our distress, no light in our darkness, no solution in our perplexity, no hope in our despondency. But if we continue to trust in the God-man, we may hear Him sweetly saying: "Let not your heart be troubled; believe in

God, and believe in me. In my Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you." The soldier fighting on the field of battle in what he believes to be a just cause, can put his trust in the Comrade in White, who stands by his side and dwells in his heart; and then, whether he lives or must lay down his life, he knows that all will be well with him.

In the latter part of our gospel for today Christ appeals to the testimony of John the Baptist, who was His divinely appointed forerunner, and who, therefore, fulfilled the prophecy of Malachi, who had written centuries before. Here is another reason for trusting in Christ; He fulfilled prophecy. Since God only can foresee the future, and control for His own purpose contingent events, Christ must have been the one "who was to come" as the Messiah and for whom John prepared the way. So, whether we can understand Him always or not, let us trust Him, believe in Him, and accept Him as our Lord and Saviour, and all will be well.

"God moves in a mysterious way
  His wonders to perform;
He plants His footsteps on the sea,
  And rides upon the storm.

"Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,
  But trust Him for His grace;
Behind a frowning providence
  He hides a smiling face."

IV

THE FOURTH SUNDAY IN ADVENT

THE FAITHFUL HERALD

Text: John 1:19-28

In ancient times, whenever a king desired to visit a province of his dominion, he would send his herald before him to prepare the way. So Christ, our heavenly King, when He decided to come to the earth, sent John the Baptist as His forerunner, to get the people ready for His advent. But John's character and mission differed in many ways from those of the ordinary messengers of the ordinary kings of the earth, just as the principles of Christ's kingdom were different from those of their kingdoms. We want to study this unique herald and his unique mission today.

I. The Character of the Herald.

God chose wisely when He selected John the Baptist to be the forerunner of His Son. First, John was hardy and rugged, so that he could live in the wilderness, wear coarse clothing and subsist on coarse food. In that way he lived a somewhat austere life and emphasized a somewhat legalistic morality, and thus was vitally connected with the Old Testament dispensation. At the same time he proclaimed baptism unto repentance for the remission of sins, and then pointed to Christ as "the Lamb of God that beareth away the sins of the world," and thus he was livingly related to the New Testament dispensation. So he was just the kind of a man to be the *connecting link* between the Old and the New. In him there was the union of the law and the gospel.

Then, John was humble. It would have been unfortunate if a man of a proud and ambitious temper had been selected for this special mission. He might have thought too much of his own honor and reputation. He might have become a rival of the King Himself. But, on the contrary, he said, in

speaking of Christ, "He must increase, but I must decrease." He also refused to proclaim himself anything great; he was not the Christ, nor Elijah, nor even "that prophet;" he was only "a voice in the wilderness." He was willing that his personality should drop out of public view as soon as the Christ would come. To him it mattered nothing that his fame would be eclipsed. How noble it was in him to declare that he was unworthy to unloose the shoe-latchet of Him who was to come after him! What a lesson of humility and self-forgetfulness we may learn from the character of John the Baptist! It is so easy for men to be proud and ambitious. Some even think more of themselves than they do of Christ. One might almost say that they stand up in front of the cross, and then stretch out their arms, so that even the arms of the cross are hidden by them. Better far to *hide ourselves behind the cross than to hide the cross behind us.* Yes, we can go to school to John the Baptist.

Another great characteristic of John was his fearlessness. He had both physical and moral courage. How plainly he spoke to the Scribes and Pharisees who came out to him with their hypocritical pretences! He called them by their right names. He told them that they were not the true children of Abraham; that their boasted descent from Abraham would be of no avail to them unless they mended their motives and lives; that God could raise children to Abraham of the very stones by the wayside and in the field. Such language must have been very stinging to those proud Jews who thought that the blood of Abraham in their veins would give them precedence over all others, even if they were lacking in true righteousness. Nor did John hold back his rebuke of Herod, though it cost the brave accuser his liberty and finally his life.

Thus just such a man as John the Baptist, so upright and austere, so faithful and fearless, and yet so humble and self-effacing, was well adapted to be the herald of the coming of our Lord. God knows how to choose His instruments to accomplish His purposes.

II. The Function of the Herald.

We may well ask, Just what was the specific office of John the Baptist in the kingdom of God, in His plan of redeeming grace? Was John just arbitrarily chosen to fill up this gap between the Old Testament prophets and the Messiah, or was he a necessary link in a living plan? Why could not Christ have been His own herald, and why did He have to have a forerunner at all?

Let us attend to these questions. It was right and proper for God to choose someone who would be a vital link between His two dispensations. Let us remember that with God's redemptive plan everything is vital and organic; nothing merely arbitrary and mechanical. So the connecting link must be a person—a living, rational, ethical person. But he must be a person so constituted that he would livingly belong to both dispensations. As we have already seen, John was precisely that kind of a character; he had in his make-up the elements of both the Old and the New Covenants, both the Law and the Gospel, the austere righteousness and legalism of the one and the forgiving and atoning love of the other; just as he himself said (1 John 1:17): "For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ." With one hand this great personage reached over and grasped the Old and with the other he grasped the New, and thus became the living human link between them. How organic is God's way of revelation and redemption! Christ Himself could not appropriately have been this link, for He brought in the New Covenant and was its special minister and administrant.

It was in the nature of the kingdom, too, that the Mediator of the New Covenant should have a forerunner, one who would go before Him and prepare the way for His coming. That plan would call the attention of the multitude to the coming Messiah, so that they would be looking for Him and be ready to consider His claims and His proffer of salvation. Was not that a better way than for Christ to come suddenly among them, without any warning and preparation? To say nothing more, it would not have been a good

pedagogical method for Christ to come among them unannounced and suddenly. If a great man were to arrange to come into your community to deliver an important message to the people, would he come without prior preparation and announcement? Would he spend his valuable time going about first in the community advertising his addresses and asking the people to come out to hear him? What a poor method that would be! So John the Baptist was Christ's divinely chosen advance agent, and when Christ came His audiences were assembled and were ready to hear His message of the gospel. He did not need to go around gathering up a crowd. You see, God always acts in the rational and normal way. He never resorts to artificial and superficial devices as men so often do.

We may learn another valuable lesson in considering John's office in the plan of redemption. God wants *human partners* in the work of saving the world. True, being all-powerful, He might do everything Himself; but that would not be the best way. It is better to give men something to do; better for them and better for the kingdom. So, while Christ might have been His own herald, He chose the wiser plan of giving that office over into the hands of another, so as to give him a share in the great work of spreading the glad tidings. Christ will not do for us what we can do for ourselves. "Man's extremity is God's opportunity." All along the history of redemption He has been using human agents to help Him in extending and establishing His kingdom in the world. Note some of His "chosen vessels:" Noah, Abraham, Moses, Joshua, Samuel, David, the prophets, the apostles and evangelists, the church fathers, the reformers, the ministers of the gospel, the Aarons and Hurs who have upheld their hands. Thus we are all "laborers together with God." In a sense, we are all John the Baptists; we can all help to "prepare the way of the Lord and make His paths straight." Says Paul right on this line of thought: "How shall they believe on Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?" And again: "For seeing that in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom knew not God, it was

God's good pleasure through the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe." Yes, God's ways are the best ways.

The rite of baptism which John used was admirably adapted to his office of forerunner. It was the sign of cleansing from sin. In the whole Old Testament ritual sprinkling was employed as the symbol of spiritual purification. All the Jews who went out to hear and see John were accustomed to that method, and therefore would understand what was meant by John's baptism. Therefore they would know that, in order to enter the kingdom which Christ was about to introduce, they must repent of their sins and have them forgiven and washed away. Hence his baptism was called "the baptism of repentance unto the remission of sins."

But his preaching or message was no less relevant. He said, "Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Therefore the people would understand that the kingdom of the Messiah was to be an *ethical* kingdom, not a worldly one; that they would have to be willing to be cleansed of their sins first of all in order to be members of that kingdom. It was to be a kingdom of righteousness, not one of earthly power and grandeur. But even John, though standing at the threshold of the kingdom, was led by the Holy Spirit to avoid the legalism and self-righteousness of the Pharisees; for, instead of preaching that men could be saved by their own deeds and goodness, he told the people plainly that the coming Messiah was "the Lamb of God that beareth away the sins of the world." Therefore, He, and He alone, could make atonement for sin, and He alone could "baptize them with the Holy Ghost and with fire," and thus beget within their hearts the new life of holiness that would fit them for membership in the kingdom. So John even in his day preached the blessed doctrine of justification by faith and salvation by grace. He was indeed a faithful herald.

Yes, he taught that men must "make straight the way of the Lord;" that is, the Lord would not come to them in any crooked or unethical paths. They must be contrite and

humble, and they must exercise true faith in the Redeemer, or they could not be saved. When the Messiah saves, He will save *righteously*. He saves men *from* their sins, not *in* their sins. He will not use any crooked devices. He will redeem us only in the frank and open way of repentance and faith; and faith means trust in the atoning Lamb of God who makes real satisfaction for sin and upholds thereby the righteous will and law of God.

Let us always walk in the straight way ourselves, and then be John the Baptists in our degree and place, proclaiming the straight way for all the world. So may the lesson from the gospel for the day have its practical effect on our hearts and lives!

V

CHRISTMAS

WHY THE SON OF GOD CAME IN HUMAN FORM

Text: Luke 2:1-14

During the Holy Advent Season we have been preparing our thoughts for the proper celebration of the coming of our Lord upon earth in human form. We have been getting ready for the Advent of the blessed Christ-Child. And now we see Joseph and Mary going down to Bethlehem to be enrolled as citizens of the Roman government, according to the civil law. There the Saviour is born, and is cradled in a manger, while the angels proclaim His Advent to the shepherds keeping their flocks by night. When we contemplate this great event, this most epochal event, in the world's history, many thoughts crowd upon us, and we find it difficult to decide which to use. But let us today consider together this theme: Why the Son of God came to the earth in human guise; in other words, why He enfolded Himself in human nature and became man.

It is a crucial question, and we ought to understand the divine reasons as well as we can. The Bible teaches this great doctrine of the incarnation of the Son of God (John 1:14): "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us; and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father." Why did the Word become flesh? Why could we not have been redeemed in some other way? Was it the best way? Was it the only way by which sinful man could be brought back to God? Whether it was the only way we may well leave to the wisdom of God; but that it was the eminently fitting way we may see clearly after a little thought. Looking at the little Babe in the manger today, let us try to answer this pregnant question, "Why?"

1. When man sinned in the garden of Eden, *he fell from God,* and bore down with him all his posterity. Hav-

ing thus fallen from God, and rendered himself morally unable, *he could not lift himself up to God,* any more than you and I could lift ourselves bodily into the air. But if man could not lift himself up to God, God could come down to man in condescending mercy and love.

And that is what God did in the person of His only begotten Son, who was of the same essence as Himself. He came down and took into His Godhead human nature, and thus reunited divinity and humanity in the person of the Babe of Bethlehem. And now, when you and I are united by regeneration and faith with Christ, the God-man, our humanity is reunited with Deity. Is not that a beautiful way, an organic way, a living way? It is no makeshift, no mere device. Hence the angels could proclaim to the shepherds, "Unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord." You see in that angelic message the doctrine that Christ was both God and man. This is precisely what the apostle taught when he wrote (2 Cor. 5:19): "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their tresspasses unto them."

2. Another reason why the Son of God came as He did is this: *We can understand the concrete so much better than the abstract.* Such are the limitations of our poor, weak human nature. In all our schools we teach on this principle; as it were, we "concrete" things. We teach children by means of object-lessons; we pass from the known to the unknown, from the concrete to the abstract. It is the normal pedagogical method. Even in the college, the university and the technical school we employ this method.

Did not God, our heavenly Father, understand our need? Did He not know what would be the best kind of teaching for His weak and erring children? He surely did. He knew that we could not get a clear conception of Him when He is defined as an Absolute Spirit, uncreated and perfect. Who can get a definite idea of God in His absolute and infinite form? Therefore, in the person of His Son He came to the earth, and took on Him a human form and nature, so

that we might clearly apprehend Him. All of us can see Him clearly as a little Babe in the manger, as a youth of twelve in the temple, as a man going about doing good, as the suffering Saviour in Gethsemane, in the judgment hall, on the cross of Calvary. How simple and plain it all is!

So we may ask, Who was Jesus Christ? He was God made plain to us; He was God made concrete for us; He was God come down out of the realm of eternity and infinity into the realm of time and space where we dwell, so that we might get a clear conception of Him. That is precisely what the Scriptures teach with regard to the mission of Christ: "No man hath seen God at any time: the only-begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him" (John 1:18); He was "Immanuel, God with us;" He was "God *manifest* in the flesh;" "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father also." Can any one tell us in what other way than by a divine incarnation God could have brought Himself and His redeeming grace so definitely and explicitly to our apprehension?

3. Again, *the human family needed an example,* showing them how to live. God's precepts and commands are all good and useful as divine directions, but they do not appeal to us so strongly as does a concrete example. No merely human being could set before the world such a pattern, because all men are conceived and born in sin. In His pure Deity the Son of God could not have lived a human life here on earth, and shown us how to live such a life. But by coming to the world and assuming human nature, and becoming truly man, He could live before the world a model *human* life, thus giving us the inspiration of His example. Thus He showed us how to live a live of true righteousness in the world of temptation and sorrow. And how much we are helped and inspired by looking at Him as our Model! For this reason He said to His disciples and through them to us (John 13:15): "For I have given you an example, that ye also should do as I have done to you." The apostle enjoins men thus (1 Pet. 2:21): "For hereunto were ye called:

because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, that ye should follow His steps."

4. The divine Son of God also became man because *He knew our need of sympathy,* of comradeship in both joy and sorrow. It was meet that He should assume true human nature that He might enter into all our human experiences and that we might know that He has done so.

If you have a deep affliction, you do not go for sympathy to some giddy person who has never had a real sorrow in all his life. Rather, you seek some one who has had an experience like your own, and then you can condole with each other, and have a true fellow-feeling. Such sympathy all of us need betimes.

Do you suppose our heavenly Father did not know our frame; did not know our need of a sympathizing friend? He surely did. Therefore, He sent His only-begotten Son into the world to take upon Himself our very nature, so that He might rejoice and suffer just as we do; might know by actual experience all about our trials, temptations and disappointments. He was born a little child (that is what Christmas means), and grew as a child; so He knows all about the experiences of childhood. He passed through the period of youth and adolescence, and can sympathize with all the peculiar and varied experiences of that period of human life. Then He developed in the experiences of mature years, and so knows all about them. With reverence it may well be said that Christ has a "first-hand" knowledge of all our human joys and sorrows. Thus all classes can go to Him for sympathy. Each of us may say to Him: "Lord Jesus, thou knowest all about my trials, for thou wert and art human." This makes Jesus not only our divine-human Saviour, but also our sympathetic Friend, the Companion of all our trials.

How could the Son of God have come into such close, vital and real touch with our humanity in any other way than by the incarnation? True enough, He might have sympathized with us even in His pure state of Deity, and of course He did, or He never would have come to share our

griefs; but mere divine sympathy could never have been made so *real* to us as it has been made through His actual partaking of our very life, our human nature and conditions. Here we have the precise teaching of the divine Word (Heb. 4:15): "For we have not an High Priest who cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, but one who was tempted in all points like as we are, yet without sin."

5. Nothing so *touches and wins the human heart as unselfish sacrifice.* Who is not melted to tears by the love and self-abnegation of a mother? Suppose it is a mother who toils in her lowly home that she may give her son an education. We have known audiences to be comparatively dull and listless until the speaker told a simple, pathetic story of a parent's loving forgetfulness of self.

Henry Ward Beecher used to tell the story of a man who went as a substitute without charge to the Civil War for his neighbor, who was poor and had a family to maintain. In one of the bloody battles on a southern field the young substitute was slain, and was buried in a southern graveyard. Some years afterward the man for whom he gave his life, took some of his earnings, went to the southern cemetery, and placed a humble stone at the head of the grave of his benefactor, with this brief but touching inscription upon it, "He died for me." As the great preacher told the story, the tears would stream down his cheeks, and his auditors could not refrain their emotions.

Did not our Saviour know what would touch and melt the heart of humanity? Ah, surely He did! Therefore He said, "I will go down there to the earth, and take on Me the very nature of those sorrowing people, and I will bear their sins in my own person on the cross. That will melt their hearts."

And it has. More persons have been won to God through the sweet old story of Christ's unselfish sacrifice on the cross than in any other way. And since He really suffered in our stead, really bore the penalty of our sins, we know He must love us. And, oh, how winsome is His love, expressed in so unselfish a way! This is also part of the Advent message;

another reason why the beloved Son of God came in the flesh. In what other way could He have so effectively exhibited His surpassing love?

6. But most important of all, the eternal Son of God had to *come to make atonement for sin;* to take upon Him our iniquities and the penalty that would otherwise have been visited upon us. How could He have atoned for *human* sin without taking upon Himself *human* nature? Could an angel have come down to the earth, kept the law in our stead, and then died for us upon the cross? No, it was not angels who were to be redeemed. Could the Son of God as pure Deity have been "wounded for our transgressions, and bruised for our iniquities?" No; only human nature could really suffer as we would have had to suffer if we had been compelled to bear the penalty of our own sins. But no merely human being could have made expiation for the sins of the whole world. One absolutely pure man, even if he had lived on the earth for a few years, could not have atoned for the sins of even a single human individual.

But when the Son of God, who was in essence God Himself, assumed our human nature into the person of His Godhead, He endued it with infinite worth by virtue of His Deity, and therefore, when He suffered and died on the cross, He could and did make satisfaction for the sins of the *whole world.* This is just what the Bible teaches—"that He by the grace of God should taste of death for *every man*" (Heb. 2:29). Paul asserts twice that Christ "died for all" (2 Cor. 5:14-15).

Now we see why the angels sang their glad Christmas anthem over Bethlehem's plains on the night of Christ's nativity: "Glory to God in the highest, peace on earth, good will to men." It was because the only-begotten Son of God had reunited God and man in His own person and so could work out in human conditions a perfect righteousness for man and bear for man the punishment of sin, and thus bring peace on earth. So He is the Prince of Peace, the great, heavenly Peace Maker. Thus He says to us: "Peace I

leave with you; my peace I give unto you; not as the world giveth give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid." And so Paul keeps up the sweet refrain: "Therefore, being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."

VI

SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS

THE CHRIST-CHILD IN THE TEMPLE

Text: Luke 2:33-40

Eight days after our Lord's birth He was taken to the temple for circumcision. This was according to the law of Moses, proving that Christ was "born under the law," and was to be subjected to the law in all things. It was therefore consistent when, at the age of forty days, He was borne to the temple again for the rite of purification, especially in His mother's behalf, for this service was according to the same Old Testament regulation (Lev. 12:2-8; Ex. 13:2-12). While the Christ-Child was in the temple at this time, two aged saints, Simeon and Anna, gave Him their adoration.

Like all other incidents in the life of Christ, this one has a real meaning in God's plan of redeeming grace. In a series of statements we will try to explain its significance. The question before us is, Why was Christ brought to the temple at this time?

I. To Prove His Vital Connection with the Old Testament.

God's plan is a unit. It has not been thrown together in a fragmentary way. With God there are no after-thoughts; He sees the end from the beginning. He chose the Hebrew people to be the bearers of His truth and His redemptive plan; and now that "the fulness of time" has come, He will fit the Redeemer into the preparatory dispensation, which He has carried forward through the centuries.

So Christ was brought to the temple on the eighth and fortieth days, in order that He might be placed completely under the law that God had instituted for the Hebrew people, that He might fulfill all its requirements, and thus "redeem them that were under the law." Thus He became the Saviour of the Jews, and through them of the Gentiles.

Do you not see how He carried out the unity of His purpose through all the ages? By having a unified and coherent plan, He will bind all His redeemed people together in the organism of a spiritual fellowship. Besides, a God who has a well-devised plan, and who carries it out, begets in us confidence that He will not fail to complete the redemption He has promised to His people. Another purpose was:

II. To Show How True Israelites Recognized the Messiah When He Came.

Observe the beautiful tribute paid by the evangelist to Simeon's character: "And this man was righteous and devout, looking for the consolation of Israel; and the Holy Spirit was upon him. And it had been revealed unto him by the Holy Spirit that he should not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ." When Christ was brought to him, he "received Him into his arms, and blessed God, and spoke his great hymn of praise, "Now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace," etc.

A little while afterward Anna, the aged saint, came to the place where the Infant Saviour was. She was at least eighty-four years old, perhaps ninety-one. Of her the text says she "departed not from the temple, worshipping with fastings and supplications night and day." Then the narrative continues: "And coming up at that very hour, she gave thanks unto God, and spake of Him to all them that were looking for the redemption of Israel."

Both these aged saints were looking and longing for the coming of Christ. They submitted to the leading of the Holy Spirit; they were humble, believing, spiritually-minded persons. That was just the frame of mind to prepare them for the Messiah's coming; and so, when He came, they recognized Him. You might say they knew Him by spiritual intuition. Perhaps a better way to express it would be, the Holy Spirit, to whose guidance they submitted themselves, led them to recognize Jesus as their Messiah. The Holy Spirit always opens men's spiritual eyes, and always leads them to Christ. Even before the Holy Spirit was poured out in pentecostal power, He always testified of Christ.

When appeal is made to history, it will be seen that whenever men and women were looking for the consolation and redemption of Israel, their desires were fulfilled. Note, for example, how the wise men from the east were led to Christ; so also were Cornelius, the Ethiopian eunuch, Lydia and Dorcas. Such has been human experience throughout human history; such is men's experience today. All souls that desire and seek Christ will find Him. "He that seeketh findeth." If, therefore, you have not yet found Christ, it is because you have not earnestly sought Him. "If any one is willing to do His will, he shall know of the doctrine," etc. Christ must have the open mind, the receptive and earnest spirit.

Again this appearance of Jesus in the temple was intended—

III. To Indicate the Holy Spirit's Leading and Inspiration.

No one can read the aged Simeon's hymn of praise without feeling that it exhibits more than merely human wisdom. It has been adopted by large portions of the Christian Church as a part of its beautiful vesper service, and is known as *Nunc Demittis,* which are the Latin of its first few words, "New lettest thou depart." This incident is the only one in the Bible that tells us about Simeon. He is mentioned nowhere else. Yet this humble, unknown man spoke words that the Church has been chanting through all the centuries since his day. This surely is proof of a higher than human source for them. They were indited by the Holy Spirit.

Look at the beauty and majesty of these statements: "For mine eyes have seen thy salvation, which thou hast prepared before the face of all peoples, a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel." Not only are there beauty, majesty and poetry here, but there is also great truth that would be beyond the conception of a narrow and provincial Jew. Even the learned Scribes and Pharisees of Christ's day could not understand God's world-wide plan in the Messiah. It even required years of training before

Christ's apostles could grasp the thought that the gospel was for "all peoples, a light to lighten the Gentiles." Where did Simeon, when the Redeemer was still an infant only forty days old, derive such a vision of His mission? How could he foresee that Christ's commission would be, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to the whole creation?" At the same time he adds, "And the glory of thy people Israel," showing that he grasped the truth Christ afterward uttered when He said, "Salvation is of the Jews." How did this humble Jew thus grasp the whole unified and organic plan of God? He was endued with more than earthly wisdom. He was inspired by the Holy Spirit.

The same fact is verified when we note what Simeon said to Mary, the mother of Christ: "This Child is set for the falling and the rising of many in Israel." What prophecy! Remember "the falling" of the Scribes, Pharisees, Sadducees, and finally of the city of Jerusalem. Recall also "the rising" of the apostles and many of the humble Jews who accepted Christ. He shall be "a sign which shall be spoken against." Had Simeon not been enlightened by the Holy Spirit, how could he have foreseen that this little Child would be defamed by many of the leaders among the Jews, Greeks, and Romans? All through Christian history this prophecy has been literally fulfilled, and is being fulfilled today. "Yea, and a sword shall pierce through thine own soul," the aged seer continued. At Christ's crucifixion this prediction was literally fulfilled. Another primary purpose of Messiah's coming was "that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed," in Simeon's farsighted words. How could he foresee that the Infant in his arms would be the greatest searcher of hearts that the world has ever known! Think of the volumes on volumes of spiritual experiences that have been written since those prophetic utterances of aged Simeon were made! Note what the writer of the letter to the Hebrews says: "For the Word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing even to the dividing of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and quick to discern the thoughts and intents of the heart; and there is no creature that is not manifest in His sight: but

all things are naked and laid open before the eyes of Him with whom we have to do." The predictions of Simeon evince the great truth of 2 Pet. 1:21: "No prophecy ever came by the will of man: but men spake from God, being moved by the Holy Spirit."

The incident of our gospel was also intended to teach us a very practical lesson, namely:

IV. To Exemplify the Beauty of Aged Piety.

We do not know what Simeon's age was. No doubt he was far advanced in years. Anna was either eighty-four or ninety-one. Yet they were worshipping the Infant Saviour!

Nothing can be more beautiful and inspiring than piety in the aged. They serve as an example to the young. More than one young person is led to accept Christ by the beautiful lives of aged saints, who prove how good it is to trust in God. When people have been religious throughout a long life, and in old age are cheerful and content, they bear a powerful witness to the upholding grace of the gospel. They prove that the gospel is a real staying power; that the religion of Christ does not wear out through continued use. The writer of these lines is happy to bear testimony to the salutary influence of his saintly grandparents upon his life.

Now let us gather up the helpful lessons of our gospel for Sunday after Christmas: First, God works according to a foreseen and foreordained plan to carry out His purpose of redeeming grace; and thus we may put our whole trust in Him. Second, those who have the spiritual mind will be sure to recognize Christ when He comes to them, and they may be sure He will not overlook them. Third, if the Holy Spirit came to Simeon and inspired his marvelous hymn of praise, *Nunc Demittis,* we may rely on the whole Bible as having come from the same divine source, for Paul declares that "every Scripture is God-breathed" (2 Tim. 3:16). Fourth, whether we are young or old, or middle-aged, the religion of Christ will be our stay and comfort; for if God does not forsake the aged whose days are almost numbered,

neither will He forsake those of us who must still bear the heat and burden of the day. To this end we have a satisfying assurance in the last verse of our text, which says: "And the child grew, and waxed strong, becoming filled with wisdom: and the grace of God was upon Him." One who possesses these qualities and whom God thus approves may well command all our trust and allegiance.

VII

CIRCUMCISION DAY

CHRIST AND THE LAW

Text: Luke 2:21

On the eighth day after Christ's birth He was brought to the temple for circumcision. At the same time the parents brought their humble offering to be laid upon the altar of the temple. All this was according to the Jewish law. If you will read the lesson for this day and a few verses further in the gospel (Luke 2:21-24), and compare it with the Old Testament law (Lev. 12:2-8; 5:11; Ex. 13:2-12), you will see precisely what the legal requirement was.

What were the meaning and purpose of this incident in the life of Christ? Was the circumcision of Christ a mere form or ceremony, or was it a real, vital and necessary link in the divine plan of redemption? Let us analyze the event, and at the same time learn some useful and inspiring lessons from it.

I. The Obedience and Example of Christ's Parents.

It was meet that they should carry Him to the temple, and consecrate Him there to God's service in the divinely appointed way. It speaks well for them; it proved their concern for the spiritual welfare of their child. Nor did they delay presenting Him to God; they did not say that they would let Him grow up to years of accountability, and then permit Him to decide for Himself whether He wanted to be circumcised or not, and whether he wanted to live a religious life or a merely worldly one. No, they obeyed God's law as faithful Hebrews, and did not question why. If there was any advantage accruing to the child and themselves from the rite of circumcision, they were anxious to avail themselves of the benefit.

Their obedience furnishes a good example for parents

today. They should take their children early to the house of God, and consecrate them to Him. Happy the man who can say, "My parents carried me to God's temple when I was a babe in arms, and thus I have been a regular attendant at divine service all my life." As baptism is now the divinely appointed ordinance of entrance into the covenant of grace in the place of the circumcision of the Old Testament, parents should not delay the consecration of their children to God in His holy sacrament. Since there is a special grace bestowed in baptism, parents do wrong to deprive their children of its blessing.

II. Christ's Obedience to the Law.

Since circumcision was the rite of initiation into the Jewish covenant relation, Christ's submission to this rite meant that He placed Himself under the ceremonial law. It was fitting that He should do this. As the apostle puts it, "When the fulness of time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, that He might redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons."

There were good reasons why He should do this even from His infancy. God Himself has instituted the ceremonial law, not, indeed, for perpetual obligation, but to be observed faithfully until all its beautiful and sacred symbolism had been completely fulfilled in the person and work of the Messiah, who was to be its true archetype. In this way, by keeping the law, He best fulfilled it. He was both divine and human, and therefore could give it perfect fulfillment. Thus He did not separate Himself from God's plan of redemption through His chosen people, but identified Himself livingly with it, giving it a historic and organic completeness.

It was also judicious for God to lead Christ's parents to fulfill the Jewish law. Had they not done so, and had not Jesus Himself afterward observed the Jewish law, His influence on the Jews from the very beginning would have been lost. They would have looked upon Him as erratic, radical and insubordinate. Thus the Messiah came really and

historically to the world through the chosen people according to God's plan from the beginning.

Still another reason why Christ had to be placed under the ceremonial law was this: God's chosen people had been placed under that law, and had found it difficult to obey. Now if the Messiah, who must be the Redeemer of the Jews as well as the Gentiles, would pass through the whole gamut of human experience, and thus be the Friend of and Sympathizer with God's chosen people, He must also pass through the experience of keeping their law, as well as through all their other experiences. Thus He could enter into the fullest sympathy with His people. He could "redeem them that were under the law," and thus free them from its condemnation when they had failed, and thus make them the free children of God. Observe that God's organic plan was what Jesus said at one time, "Salvation is of the Jews." It was not for the Jews alone, but it was *of* them. God does not work without a plan. It was not a mere artificial device that He chose Abraham and his posterity to be the bearers of salvation to all the world, and to receive in trust for the world "the oracles of God." So He was a true Hebrew, and fulfilled the Hebrew law to the letter, so that He could abrogate its ceremonialism, free His people from it, and thus place them in living connection with the universal ethical and spiritual law of God. The ceremonial law was not of perpetual obligation. It was good, very good for its purpose, which was the discipline of God's chosen people. They needed just such special legislation to train them, to make of them a peculiar people, to develop them for their great mission, that of being a blessing to all the families of the earth, and to refine and discipline that special religious quality that was needed to make them the progenitors of the Saviour of the world. When the ceremonial law had been fulfilled perfectly by the God-man and the Jewish Messiah, it had served its purpose and could be laid aside, just as the husk, however useful and necessary for a time, is laid aside when it has served its purpose.

The ceremonial law was one of types and shadows, as is

taught in the letter to the Hebrews. All its sacrifices and offerings pointed to Christ. Every lamb "on Jewish altars slain," every pigeon and dove brought to the tabernacle and temple symbolized the divine-human expiation that was made on Calvary. They were the types; Christ was the Archetype. Thus when the Archetype had come and had absorbed in Himself all the types, there would be no further need of the latter. This does not mean that the ceremonial law has no value to us today. We should still study it devoutly and earnestly in order that we may see how God led and trained His people, made them ready for the advent of the Messiah, and set forth His marvelous person and redeeming work in expressive types and symbols. While we no longer need to observe the old Jewish law, yet we may learn many a useful lesson from its historical significance and its place in God's redemptive plan. This law is no mere curio; it is still "a schoolmaster," if not to lead us to Christ, at least to teach us many a useful lesson about Him. There is something heavenly about the old tabernacle and temple services. Nothing in God's book is valueless. All history is our pedagogue.

III. Christ's Relation to the Moral Law.

Let it also be borne in mind that the ceremonial law was vitally connected with the moral law. In the Hebrew commonwealth and economy the two were not dissociated. No; they were bound up together. It might be put in this way: The ceremonial law was the moral law applied to the religious ordinances of the Jews. Thus, by keeping the former, they would learn more and more during their period of tutelage about the inner character of the latter. Hence the best of them would be able, when Christ came and the Holy Spirit was outpoured, to understand Christ's profound spiritual interpretation of the Ten Commandments in the great Sermon on the Mount.

Was it not right and fitting, then, for Christ to keep the ceremonial law before the Jewish people in order that He might lead them up to the inner ethical character of the

moral law? Yes, He secured the organic connection between them, just as the shell is livingly related to the kernel until the former has served its purpose.

So Christ fulfilled the ceremonial law for the Jews, and upheld and conserved the moral law for them and all the people of the world; for, while the ceremonial law was temporary, the moral law is of perpetual obligation. Christ did not keep the moral law for us in order to abrogate it, but to uphold it before the divine justice for us, who could not fulfill it, and thus to free us from its condemnation and at the same time to beget within us, by the power of the Holy Spirit, the disposition and strength to walk according to its requirements. Here Paul must interpret Christ's gracious work in our behalf (Rom. 8:1-4): "There is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death; for what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God, sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: that the ordinance of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit."

So Christ by His active and passive obedience does not free us from living good lives and doing good works according to the moral law; He frees us from condemnation when we fail, and then repent and accept His righteousness. The law cannot save us, because we do not keep it. Christ saves us, and Christ alone, by grace through faith, and then breathes within us His sanctifying spirit, so that we may be lifted up to the high plane of the law, and bring forth the fruit of good works. Before conversion the office of the law is to convict us of sin and thus lead us to Christ; after conversion, to direct us in the righteous way of life. Christ does not save us *in* our sins, but *from* our sins; and not only from our sins, but also unto righteousness.

Our great lesson for the day is, Let us fly to Christ for pardon, salvation and conversion; and let us do that first

of all; then let us walk in the highway of holiness before the Lord and all our neighbors. And since Circumcision Day comes on our New Year's Day, how fitting it would be to come to Christ for conversion, if we have not already done so, or if we are Christians, to consecrate our lives more fully to His service!

VIII

SUNDAY AFTER NEW YEAR

GOD'S CARE FOR HIS OWN

Text: Matt. 2:13-23

The gospel lesson for today, Sunday after New Year, illustrates in a historical way how God's providence works and intervenes to carry out His purpose of redeeming grace. Had He not performed miracles and revealed Himself in a supernatural way at this special epoch, His redemptive plan would have been frustrated. We should like pointedly to ask those who reject the supernatural, and try to explain everything by mere natural evolution, how they think God could have decreed and carried out a plan of salvation without the use of miracles. By balking Herod in his cruel wrath, God spared the life of His incarnate Son, and thus made possible the redemption of the world. How else could this have been done?

Let us consider our text under the two main heads that have already been suggested: I. Man's cruel wrath; II. God's over-ruling providence.

I. Man's Cruel Wrath.

After the wise men from the east (see the gospel and sermon for Epiphany) had presented their worship and gifts to the Infant Saviour, they were warned of God in a dream not to return to their own country by way of Jerusalem, as Herod had asked them to do, but to turn eastward from Bethlehem in a more direct course. Thus the wicked king's plot was foiled, and hence he was filled with wrath and fear. The wise men had declared that Jesus was to be king of the Jews, and therefore the guilty Herod look upon Him as a rival. Therefore he resolved to slay Jesus. But how should he be able to identify Him? Then he thought out another plot, a foul and cruel one, showing to what wicked lengths he was willing to go in order to get rid of a

possible rival to the throne. He ordered all the children two years old and under in Bethlehem and its vicinity to be put to death. He knew that Jesus would be included in the limits of the age designated. And this malicious plan was carried out.

How terrible are the wrath and jealousy of man! Read the history of all the wicked kings and queens and other people of worldly power, and you will find that they have stopped at no crime to gratify their pleasure and ambition. Remember Pharaoh, Ahab, Jezebel, Nero, Galba, Caligula, the Medicis, Napoleon, Louis XIV of France, and many others scarcely less wicked and cruel. Pride, ambition, selfishness led them in their wanton ways; and back of it all and in it all was the malignant spirit of the evil one himself, inducing men even to over-reach themselves in their criminality. What a sad record it is! Wars, persecution and murder all come from the pride and wrath of men's hearts.

We may think that we are free from such heinous sins. It is true, we may not be guilty of atrocious and overt crimes, but we must also guard against the evil principle of wrath that leads to them. Christ told us we must not be angry with our brother, and St. John says that "he that hateth his brother is a murderer;" which means that hatred in the heart is the seminal principle from which murder comes. If there were no hatred, there would be no murder. Cain, the first murderer, slew his brother because he hated him; he was jealous because God looked with more favor on his brother's offering than upon his.

Some sincere persons may be troubled over the question why God permitted the slaughter of the innocents by the wicked king, while at the same time He had the power to preserve the life of Jesus. We would not try to silence such an inquiry, if honestly made, in a dogmatic way, by saying it is only a prying and idle question. But let us remember that, if God were to perform a miracle to prevent all such calamities, this would be a perfect world; it would not be a world of trial and probation. If He had saved those innocent children of Bethlehem and its vicinity, He should by the

same token save all children whose lives are endangered. No; God performs miracles only when they are necessary to carry out His great and eternal plan of redemption.

We should remember, too, that those little children who were slaughtered by the cruel king were not lost. Only their bodily lives were destroyed, not their soul life. Jesus said of little children, "Of such is the kingdom of heaven." The Divine Child, whose life was spared by an over-ruling providence when Herod's murderers came to Bethlehem, afterward died to make possible the salvation of the little ones who were slain; for the blood of the atonement covers the sins of natural depravity as well as those of actual transgression. If we will remember always God's eternal plan for His children, many of our doubts will be resolved, and we will continue to trust in His goodness and power.

This leads us to the investigation of our next point:

II. God's Interposing Providence.

After all, Herod's cruel plot was frustrated. God stepped in and over-ruled the wrath of man. Man may propose, but it is God who disposes. Note the various steps of God's intervention in order to carry out His plan of redemption. All these miracles have ample justification when we consider the moral and spiritual ends that were to be subserved. Will the rationalists—those who want to eliminate the supernatural element from the gospels and from God's dealings with the world—tell us how God could have saved the life of His Son, our Redeemer, without miracles at this time? Had He not intervened in some miraculous way, His whole redemptive purpose would have been thwarted by the wicked devices of man.

1. He led the wise men to provide money for the sojourn of Mary and Joseph and the Child in Egypt. They laid gold at His feet. The frankincense and myrrh, which were precious ointments, were doubtless sold for a goodly sum.

2. He warned the wise men to go to their own country in another way than around by Jerusalem. Thus while

Herod waited for them to return, time was given for Christ and His parents to escape into Egypt.

3. He sent an angel to warn Joseph to flee with Mary and the Child into Egypt, because Herod would seek the young Child to destroy Him. How varied are God's ways of exercising His providence! All resources are at His command. He is not limited in His ways. Sometimes He warns by merely impressing the mind by His Spirit; sometimes through an angel; at other times in a dream or a vision.

4. He led Jesus and His parents into Egypt in fulfillment of a prophecy, which said, "Out of Egypt have I called my Son." This is a remarkable case of prophecy. Who could have ever interpreted it before its fulfillment took place? Yet, now that our Lord's whole life is spread out before us, we can see just how literally it was fulfilled. We can see, too, how necessary the prophecy was, for the flight and sojourn in that distant land were essential in God's purpose to spare the life of His incarnate Son, so that He could carry out the divine plan of redeeming grace. How would the world have been redeemed had Christ been slain in His infancy?

5. When Herod was dead, the angel of the Lord again appeared to Joseph and told him to go back with the Child and Mary into the land of Israel. "For they are dead who sought the young Child's life," said the angel. How history has repeated itself ever since that remarkable deliverance! All who have ever tried to destroy Christ and His religion have died, most of them to be forgotten or consigned to infamy; while Christ is still living today in the hearts of millions of His believing people. Celsus and Porphyry sought to destroy Christianity; but they are dead and almost forgotten. Many of the Roman emperors also sought to blot out the Church of Christ; but all of them are dead. Voltaire boasted that it took twelve men to establish Christianity, but one man, meaning himself, would eliminate it from the earth; but Voltaire is dead. Thomas Paine declared that he would go through the Bible like an axman through a forest,

and when his work was done, the Bible's influence would be cut completely away; but Paine is dead, and the Bible still lives and flourishes. Yes, God knows how to deliver His own. "They are dead who sought the young Child's life."

6. Again God intervened to save His only-begotten Son. It would appear that Joseph intended to go back to Judea; but he was informed that Archelaus was reigning there in the place of his father Herod, and Joseph did not know but that the son would be as cruel and suspicious as his father had been. So the angel of the Lord directed Joseph to turn his steps into Galilee; and thus Joseph and Mary went back to their own home town of Nazareth, where they dwelt in safety with Jesus until He was thirty years of age. What a wonderful series of providences! Yet all were needed to carry out the divine purpose of redemption.

7. Once more a prophecy was to be fulfilled: "He shall be called a Nazarene." Note the marvel of these combined prophecies: Christ was to be born in Bethlehem of Judea; He was to be called out of Egypt; He was to be called a Nazarene. How contradictory those predictions must have seemed before their fulfillment! But, since we have the whole life of Christ before us, how easy it is to interpret the prophecies and note their minute fulfillment!

But let us bear in mind that God's providence is also over us. He may not always save us from physical harm. When the time came for His Son to die, He did not intervene to spare Him that ordeal. But we may know that, whatever the ordeal through which we may be called to pass, "all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to His purpose." Jesus told us that God notes the sparrow's fall, and that we are of more value than many sparrows. God clothes the fields and beautifies the lilies. Will He not also care for us? God has not forsaken His world. It is not an orphan world. We are not orphan children. If we place our hand in His, He will lead us in the path that we should go. He says, "I will guide thee with

mine eye;" and He can see in the darkness as well as in the light.

"Hosanna with a cheerful sound
To God's upholding hand!
Ten thousand snares our paths surround,
And yet secure we stand.

"How wondrous is that mighty power
Which formed us with a word!
And every day and every hour
We lean upon the Lord.

"God is our Sun, whose daily light
Our joy and safety brings;
Our feeble frame lies safe at night
Beneath His sheltering wings."

IX

EPIPHANY SUNDAY

GUIDED BY A STAR

Text: Matt. 2:12

We are now entering upon that part of the Church Year which is known as the Epiphany season. The word "Epiphany" means an appearance or a manifestation.* In the full sense every manifestation of Christ was an Epiphany, but the Church Year limits the term to a certain season, and there is no reason why we should not conform our practice to a long-established custom.

The first Epiphany was the manifestation of the Infant Saviour to the wise men from the east, who were guided by a star to His home in Bethlehem. No other star is so well known as the Star of Bethlehem, because no other ever guided men on so important a quest. We shall find this event a signal one in the history of redemption. It is fraught with vital doctrine, and contains valuable lessons for the practice of Christian living. Let us note its significance point by point.

I. Who the Wise Men Were.

They were Magi or Magians from the orient, perhaps from Babylonia, Persia or eastern Arabia. It was a name for the learned men of those countries, the men who cultivated science, practiced medicine and studied astronomy. No doubt the men mentioned in the text were familiar with the stars, and for that reason observed the new star that was shining so brightly in their eastern sky. To them it was sign for which they had evidently been looking, else they would not have recognized its significance.

We do not know how many of these wise men there were. The gospel record does not gratify human curiosity on that

*See note at the end of the sermon.

point, and so it does not matter about the number or their precise identity. However, tradition has been busy inventing names for them and calling them "the three kings." Mr. Lew Wallace, in his powerful story, "Ben Hur," follows this legend, and elaborates it in a remarkable way by his fertile imagination.

However, we should learn from the silence of the Scriptures on this point that, had it been important for us to know just who the wise men were, and how many, the information would have been given. No doubt God wants us to learn from the incident the plain and practical lessons, and this we are more likely to do than if too many particulars had been vouchsafed. We read Mr. Wallace's minute descriptions for their literary beauty; we read the gospels for their religion value. Besides, if God had gratified our curiosity on every point, the Bible would have become too large a book for practical handling and use.

II. God's Word and the Star.

How did these wise men know that the star was the sign of the advent of the King of the Jews? Surely there was no writing on the star itself or on the blue heavens around to indicate it. To suppose that they knew its significance merely by some inner light or revelation is far-fetched. No; it is much more probable that these men had received some knowledge of the Old Testament prophecies; for it must be remembered that the Jews, centuries before, had been taken captive, and carried to those very countries from which these Magi came; they had taken their Scriptures with them, and it was in these that the wise men read about the time and signs of the coming of the Messiah of the Jews. Thus it was the Word of God that led to the star and the star led to Christ. Luther believed that the pupils of Daniel transmitted to their decendants the knowledge of God which he taught them, and in this way the wise men received their information as to the meaning of the wonderful star. How beautifully God's Word and His revelations in nature blend together! The knowledge of Christ and His redemption, however, comes first through His inspired Word; then God

may employ natural phenomena to abet and impress its teaching.

The same doctrine is taught implicity in the text itself. The wise men were directed in general by the star to go to Jerusalem; but there they had to stop and inquire, "Where is He that is born King of the Jews?" Then the scribes and priests, at King Herod's request, had to look up the prophecies of the Old Testament, and there they found that the Messiah was to be born in Bethlehem of Judea. Why did not the star guide the men at once and directly to Bethlehem? Because that would have broken the connection with God's Word, and would have given a natural phenomenon a place superior to it. Thus God honors His Word "above all His name." No one was ever converted to Christ except through the medium of God's Word, which is the true means of grace. Says Paul (Rom. 10:14): "How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe on Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?" Verse 17: "So belief cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of Christ."

III. The Gospel and the Gentiles.

It is important to observe that these wise men were not Jews, but Gentiles. No doubt the shepherds, to whom the angels appeared on the night of Christ's nativity, were Jews; and so we know that the Jews were welcomed to the manger where the Infant Saviour lay, and God accepted and approved their praises. Indeed, Jesus Himself declared that "salvation is of the Jews." But this incident of the coming of the wise men from the Gentile world so soon after Jesus was born is a foreshadowing of the fact that the Gentiles as well as the Jews were to be included in God's plan of redeeming grace through the incarnate Son of God. So Christ Himself said, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to the whole creation." He also bade His disciples to begin at Jerusalem, but not to stop until they reached "the uttermost parts of the earth." Had not the visit of these Gentile sages been acceptable to God, He would not have in-

spired the gospel writer to tell the story, and thus put the divine stamp of approval upon it. Afterwards Paul became the apostle to the Gentiles, and declared himself debtor to the Jews and the Greeks and the Barbarians. How full of meaning is the visit of the wise men!

IV. The Gospel and Men of Learning.

Those Magi were what we would call the educated men of their day. We know from our study of archeology and from Greek and Roman science and philosophy at that time and centuries before, that there were many men of great depth of thought and wide culture in those olden times. While of course they knew little of the science with which we are acquainted today, yet in many other ways they were far advanced in knowledge.

The special point of interest is that these erudite men were attracted by Christ, sought for Him, were divinely guided to the place where He was, rendered homage to Him, and offered to Him their gifts. What is the lesson for us? That educated men need Christ, the Saviour, just as other people do. They also are sinners. Their cultivated intellects do not necessarily make them Christians, nor will mere learning be accepted as the basis of salvation. People cannot be saved either by their learning or by their ignorance. Christ alone can save them. "There is no other name," etc. Christ said, "I am the way, and the truth and the life; no man cometh unto the Father but by Me."

But we must remember that these learned men were welcome to come to Christ. Had they not been, God would not have appointed a star to lead them to Him. Besides, the gospel record implies that their worship of the Christ-Child was acceptable. Thus Christ came to save the learned as well as the unlearned. Some people seem to get the idea that He came especially to save the latter class. They misapply Paul's words (1 Cor. 1:26-31): "For behold your calling, brethren, that not many wise after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called," etc. But observe, the persons here referred to are those who are "wise after the flesh," those who want to glory in their cul-

ture, strength or birth rather than in the Lord. Of course, such persons, so long as they remain in that proud frame of mind, cannot be saved. But that does not mean that they do not *need* salvation; and so, if they will come in penitence, humility and faith, Christ will prove to them a precious Redeemer. While the untutored are just as welcome as any one else, let us remember that the educated are not excluded on account of their learning. It is significant that, when Christ's immediate disciples had gone into hiding, probably through fear and despair, two educated men, Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, went to Pilate, and secured permission to take the Saviour's body down from the cross and give it respectful burial in Joseph's new tomb. Thus God chose them to fulfill one of the prophecies (Isa. 53:9): "And they made His grave with the wicked, and with *a rich man* in His death."

How beautiful by very contrast were these early Epiphanies of our holy Redeemer! The shepherds, who were doubtless unlearned men, came to Christ, and were welcome. So likewise the learned men from the east were accepted as true worshippers.

V. The Gifts of the Wise Men.

A good example is furnished to us by the gifts that the wise men laid at the feet of Jesus—gold and frankincense and myrrh. These were valuable offerings. Evidently these men were wealthy as well as learned. Here we have proof that people of large earthly possessions are also in need of the Saviour, and if they will come to Him in humility and faith, and consecrating their wealth to Him, they are also welcome.

Does not Christ need the gifts of rich people? Of course, they cannot purchase salvation, no matter how great their affluence. Salvation is solely by the grace of God. But wealthy men can, by their gifts, greatly aid the cause of Christ. It is not going too far to believe that the gifts of these wise and wealthy worshippers were of great service to the Infant Saviour and Joseph and Mary when they were

compelled to flee into Egypt and remain there for quite a long while.

Whether we are rich or poor, let us lay our gifts on God's altar as did the wise men, not grudgingly or of necessity, "for God loveth a cheerful giver;" and then we may know that He will use them in many ways to extend His kingdom and bear the gospel to those who need it. Think what would become of the Church of Christ if it were not for the large gifts of the rich and the many smaller gifts of the poor.

Many other good lessons may be drawn from this Epiphany, but time will permit of the mention of only one more.

VI. The Worship Accorded to the Infant Saviour by the Wise Men.

This introduces a great doctrine of our holy religion—the doctrine of the person of Christ. Who was this Babe lying in a manger, or in some other lowly crib, that learned and rich men from the east are divinely directed to come to Him, fall down and worship Him, and lay their valuable gifts at His feet? He was certainly a little human babe, with a human body and a human mind; for His humanity was real, not illusive or phantasmal. But if He was only human, what idolatry it was to worship Him? Then God, who guided the wise men by a star, would have led them to commit a wicked act of idolatrous worship!

But no! this little Child was also God. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. . . . And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us" (John 1:1-14). Said the angel to Joseph, "And He shall be called Immanuel, which is, being interpreted, God with us" (Matt. 1:23). Yes, He was "God manifest in the flesh." Therefore we can trust Him without fear and worship Him without idolatry.

NOTE: The word "Epiphany," as we have said elsewhere, means an appearance, a manifestation. It is from the Greek words *epi*, meaning forth (really an intensive), and *phanein*, to show; therefore it means to show forth, that is, to make a clear manifestation. In reference to Christ, it means those occasions on which He made a special manifestation of Himself.

In the Church Year Epiphany always occurs on January 6th, being one of the fixed festivals, so designated to distinguish it from the

movable festivals, like Easter, Whitsunday, Trinity Sundays, Advent Sundays, etc. The latter class of festivals do not occur on the same day of the month, and some of them, like Easter, not always in the same month; but the fixed festivals always occur on a specific day—Christmas on December 25th, Epiphany on January 6th, Reformation on October 31st.

According to the table of Epistles and Gospels for the Church Year, Epiphany begins with Mat. 2:1-12, which gives an account of the visit of the wise men from the East, when they saw the infant Jesus in Bethlehem, gave Him their adoration, and presented to Him their gifts. The Epistle for this day is Isa. 50:1-6, which is a prophecy of the light that will come into the world through the manifestation of the Messiah and the honor that the nations shall give to Him. This prophecy was potentially fulfilled in the coming of the Magi, and still awaits its complete fulfillment, just as the first Advent is a forecast of the second.

In connection with these pericopes, the Scripture lessons selected by the Church (see Book of Worship) may also be read, indicating other Epiphanies of our Lord. One is Isa. 49:1-9, which is a beautiful forecast of the gracious visitation of God as the Redeemer of His people. For the same day a suggested Gospel lesson is Mat. 3:13-17, describing the manifestation of Christ when He was baptized by John at the Jordan. A beautiful Epistle for Epiphany is 1 Jno. 3:1-6, containing the comforting assurance that when "He shall be manifested, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is."

In the table of lessons for morning and evening throughout the year we find appropriate Biblical selections for all the days of Epiphany week, beginning with Monday. Those prior to January 6th lead logically up to Epiphany, and those subsequent flow logically from it. By following the order of the Church Year in our reading both in the home and in public worship, the Christian person may keep in the spirit of the holy season. He will find relevant lessons from both the New and the Old Testaments. For example for the mornings of Epiphany week he will read Lu. 2:10-14; 3:15-20; Mk. 1:18; 1:9-11; Lu. 3:21, 22, 23-38; and for evenings, Gen. 1:1-31; 2:1-25; 4:1-26; 5:1-32; 6:9-22; and 7:1-24. For all the Sundays after Epiphany other appearances are set forth in the Epistles and Gospels, the Scripture lessons, and the selections for mornings and evenings.

Thus the Lutheran Church makes ample provision for its pastors and people to read and study the Bible not only in the Epiphany season, but also throughout the whole year. There is good reason why our Church is called by way of pre-eminence "the Church of the Word."

X

THE FIRST SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

JESUS IN GOD'S HOUSE

Text: Luke 2:41-52

The second Epiphany was the manifestation of Christ in the temple at the age of twelve. All of us are familiar with this beautiful event, and we need not recite it. It is suggestive of some helpful lessons to us. Let us gather them up.

I. The Devotion of His Parents.

Again we may go to school to Joseph and Mary. Imperfect though they were, in some respects their example is worthy of our imitation. Once more they have come to Jerusalem to worship, to keep the Passover, as they had been doing year by year, and to lay their gifts on God's altar; and again they have brought their Son with them to the temple. For it must be remembered that, prior to their losing Him in the crowd, they had gone with Him to that sacred place to offer their sacrifices and gifts.

How beautiful to know that they were so devoted! They went to the temple themselves; that was right and good. They did not merely "send" their son to the temple; they were there with Him in person. They set their child a good example. They also recognized their own spiritual needs, and wanted God's blessing upon their own lives. They wanted to worship God with their own lips. They could not go to the temple by proxy, even though they might have sent their own child. Let parents remember that their own lives need enrichment through the means of grace, the hearing of the preached word and the reception of the sacraments, so that they may live more uprightly and may set their children and their neighbors a good example of Christian living.

It is a real pleasure to think that Joseph and Mary took Jesus with them to the place of worship. How beautiful it

is for parents and children to go in company to God's house, and to sit together in the same pew, and mingle their voices in praises to God! We believe in individual religion, and also in *family* religion. That is taught in the Bible when it tells us that whole families were baptized, so that all might receive baptismal grace and be brought into covenant relation with God. Nothing binds the members of a household so firmly together as the spirit of true religion. There always comes a day when children will bless the memory of their parents for setting their feet early on the road to everlasting life. When Solomon uttered the injunction, "Train up a child in the way that he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart therefrom," he proved that he knew human nature, and also the conserving power of early teaching and example.

II. The Trustworthiness of Christ.

No doubt many people have wondered why it was that His parents, in starting back to Nazareth, on their return journey, permitted their son to be lost from them. Was not that an evidence of carelessness? It might be interpreted in that way; for Joseph and Mary, like all other people, were imperfect and limited, and are nowhere in the Scripture represented as paragons. Yet perhaps the better explanation would be that they had full confidence in their son, and, judging from His filial deportment and rare obedience in the past, they felt that they could trust Him out of their sight. Besides, they thought He was among their kinsfolk and acquaintances (verse 44). Their confidence in Him was so complete that they even went a day's journey homeward before they became aware that He was not in the company.

The best construction should be put upon this part of the incident; for, as we shall see later on, God permitted these things to happen to teach Christ's parents and all Christian believers a useful lesson. Meanwhile their confidence in Him gives us the key to His character and conduct. It means that He had always been obedient and thoughtful; it means that He was the kind of a child that could be trusted out of

their sight. Parents cannot always have their children under their eyes, especially after they have reached the age of twelve or more. While the children are at school, while they are at work or at play in various places, and while they are visiting with friends and neighbors, they must often be out of the immediate sight of their parents. Children should always deport themselves in such a way that their parents need not be anxious about them. It is not a good omen when parents cannot trust their children. It proves that they are not trustworthy. How good it is when parents can feel that their children will always behave themselves properly, wisely and becomingly, whether they are at home or abroad! It is evident that Christ was such a child, and by that token He set a good example for all children. Then we may ask why He remained behind in Jerusalem without His parents' knowledge, while they began their journey homeward. It was, as we have suggested, God's way of teaching them and us a very useful lesson.

III. Jesus in the Place He Should Have Been.

It is a strange circumstance that Jesus' parents sought for Him everywhere in the city for three days, and then at last looked for Him in the temple. That is where they should have looked for Him first of all. But there they found Him. There He was "sitting in the midst of the teachers" (or doctors). And when His distressed mother rebuked Him, He replied, as if surprised at their anxiety and their long quest, "How is it that ye sought me? Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?"

What did He mean by that pathetic question? His meaning might be put in this way: "Did you not know me well enough to realize that I must be doing the work my Father has given me to do? When you missed me, why did you go about in the city seeking anxiously for me? Why did you not come to the temple at once? Why did you not take it for granted I would be in my Father's house doing my appointed work?"

What a faithful Son He was! He was in His Father's

house; He was doing His Father's will. He was in the right place. This is a good lesson for children and young people. If you were to go to the city, and your parents at the time of divine service would look for you, would they find you in God's house? I hope they would. I hope they would not find you in a place of sin and frivolity. If they were concerned for your moral and spiritual welfare, they would feel happy if they found you engaged in your Father's affairs, in the house of worship.

Now we must try to penetrate a little more deeply into the meaning of this event in the life of our Redeemer.

IV. The Unique Purpose of this Epiphany in the Temple.

Had Christ been merely an ordinary child, it might simply indicate His early piety. True enough, it teaches that lesson, but it also has a much deeper significance. Let us try to analyze it.

1. This incident has been recorded in the inspired Scriptures to prove to us that Jesus was more than merely human; that He was also divine during His whole life; and that even at the tender age of twelve He was conscious of bearing a unique relation to God the Father; for He said reprovingly to His parents: "How is that ye sought me? Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?" This shows that He was conscious of His vocation. Then we note, too, that He was sitting in the midst of the doctors, asking and answering questions; "and all that heard Him were amazed at His understanding and His answers." Even at the age of twelve He exhibited supernatural wisdom. This fact, taken in connection with all the other facts of His life, affords clear evidence that He was divine.

Now, if this event had not been recorded, if no incident had been given in His life from the visit of the wise men to His baptism, many people might think that in His youth He had no consciousness of His divine character and mission. Such omission would have left too large a blank in His life. But this incident indicates that all through His

youth He was preparing Himself consciously for His heaven-appointed work.

2. Still, we may ask the question, Why is only this one incident of Christ's youth recorded in the gospel? Why did He not continue these Epiphanies throughout all the rest of His youthful years? We may be sure there is a good reason for this. It lies at hand in the narrative. He went with His parents, and "was subject to them." An example to children in their relation to their parents. To teach such a common and much-needed lesson, though seemingly of a humble character, was more important for spiritual culture, than to perform wonders that would have astounded the multitudes. What an accentuation we have here of moral and spiritual values over and above the factitious and marvelous!

And again, the world has never been permanently impressed and benefited by "boy preachers" or by precocious youths. They have usually been only a nine days' wonder. What has become of all of them that have arisen even in our own country within the last twenty-five years? All of them have disappeared and have been forgotten. So Christ waited until He was a mature man before He began His public ministry, and then all alike, both young and old, would have reason to respect the maturity of His judgment and message. We, who are living today, have more respect for Him because He pursued this sensible course, and thus hallowed the quiet years of thorough preparation for life's true work.

Let us not be too impatient to enter our chosen vocation. Let us not enter upon it only partially prepared. If Christ, the world's Redeemer, waited until He was thirty years of age, surely we ought to wait until we have the needed maturity and discipline.

XI

THE SECOND SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

JESUS AT THE WEDDING

Text: John 2:1-11

A wedding is almost always a joyful occasion. Very few people ever refuse to go to a wedding. And when two lives, already joined in the bonds of true conjugal affection, come together in holy wedlock, in accordance with God's institution, why should it not be a time of joy? We are glad that Jesus was invited to this festive occasion, and that he went—he and His mother and His disciples. It is one of His most beautiful Epiphanies.

And His presence there and His deportment are very significant. We must note this morning some of the inferences, doctrines and practical lessons that we may draw and learn from this incident of Jesus at the wedding. Does it have any bearing on the person of our Redeemer and the way of salvation. Of course, the incident is recorded for one main purpose, which we will speak of last in our sermon today; but there are other good and helpful lessons to be learned that are taught rather incidentally. Let us attend to them. We note that this wedding was—

I. A Social Occasion.

The people had gathered together to converse and enjoy fellowship with one another, and no doubt, as is usually the case at weddings, there was a good deal of innocent fun and hilarity. And Jesus was there. And Jesus passed no criticism on the festivities; there is no record that he frowned upon anything that was done. Of course, it must have been a decent occasion, and not one of roistering or sinful indulgence, or He would not have been there; or if He had been, He would have rebuked what was wrong. He never connived at sin; never encouraged it in any way.

How beautiful that He was there to grace that social function and to have a share in the people's gladness! Jesus was no recluse, no ascetic. He did not look upon the right kind of social festivities as wrong. He never objected to people's being happy. In this incident we may learn a valuable lesson about the religion that Jesus established in the earth. It is a social and joyful religion. God loves a smile better than a frown, a laugh better than a groan, joy better than sorrow. When sorrows come in the way of life, we must bear them patiently, but Christ does not want us to be miserable for the sake of being so. There is nothing sanctifying in misery in and of itself. The fact is, the Christian religion hallows all our social pleasures, and makes them pleasing to God. We do not believe that an austere, Puritanic religion is a true expression of the religion which Christ taught. At one time He said, "These things have I said unto you that ye might have joy, and that your joy might be full." The apostle enjoined these inspiring words, "Rejoice, and again I say, Rejoice." The Psalmist prayed, "Restore unto me the *joy* of thy salvation." Let us remember that when our social joys are not mixed up with sinful motives and conduct, they are pleasing to God.

II. It was a Marriage.

And our Lord's presence there was a sanction of that ordinance. Do you suppose that He would have been there, and would have added to the festivities, if marriage had not been in accordance with the divine will? No; true marriage is a divine institution. It was established at the beginning of human history when God said, "It is not good for man to be alone," and then made woman to be a helpmeet to him. And Jesus Himself referred several times to that very fact, and then said, "What therefore God hath joined together let not man put asunder." So far as we can learn from the gospel records, our Lord named only one sin that would be a sufficient ground for the separation of man and wife; and that sin would in itself be an annulment of the marriage vows on the side of the guilty party. Yes, the marriage relation is a sacred one; it ought not to be entered into carelessly

and inconsiderately. It is not merely a civil contract; it is also a religious one. Hence the wedding service among Christian people ought always to be performed by a minister of the gospel and given the sanction of the Church. It is a slighting of the religious part of this sacred obligation for young people to steal away without the knowledge of their friends to be married by a civil officer. No wonder it is so little regarded as binding by people of that kind.

III. It was an Occasion of Increasing Joy.

When the wine failed through some miscalculation of the host, Jesus turned the water of a number of vessels into wine, and when it was passed around to the guests, the master of the feast declared that the bridegroom had "kept the best wine for the last," which was contrary to the usual custom. As a rule, on such occasions the poorest wine was kept for the last when people's thirst was quenched and their appetites were more or less satisfied. But this time the order was precisely reversed. We cannot believe that the wine which Jesus made was intoxicating; it had just been made out of pure water, and would be like the pure, fresh juice of the grape. Perhaps that was the very reason why the master of the feast called it "the best wine;" it was pure and sweet, and hence was not like the sour, fermented and inferior wine that had been previously provided. We know full well that unfermented grape juice is wholesome and nutritious, and will not intoxicate, nor can any one well drink too much of it. Like pure, fresh water, it will quench the thirst, and when the appetite is satisfied, one craves no more of it for the time.

"Thou hast kept the best wine for the last." Is not that always Christ's way? It is a happy occasion when the little child is consecrated to God by Christian parents in holy baptism. Still happier is the time when that child, through religious instruction in the home and in the pastor's catechetical class, is brought to accept Christ consciously by faith, and then stands at the altar of the Church to assume for himself his baptismal vows in the sacred rite of con-

firmation. Then as He learns more about Christ and the Bible and the way of salvation by faithful attendance on the means of grace, his Christian experience grows better and better. When he grows older, the grace of God in Christ becomes more precious to him, more of a comfort, richer in hope. And then at the last when he lays aside "this earthly tabernacle," and enters the "house not made with hands, eternal in the heaven," he will exclaim, "O blessed Lord, thou hast kept the best and greatest blessing for the last." Yes that is God's way. He inspired one of the Bible writers to put it in this beautiful language: "The path of the just shineth more and more unto the perfect day."

IV. It was an Occasion for Christ to Show His True Relation to His Mother.

There is some difficulty in interpreting the conversation that took place between Jesus and His mother. When the wine failed, she came to Him and told Him the situation. Then He said to her (we give it literally as it stands in the original): "What to me and to thee, woman; not yet is mine hour come. His mother says to the servants, Whatever he may say to you, do."

What is the meaning of Christ's language to His mother? And what does He mean when He says, "Mine hour is not yet come?" Was it a rebuke of His mother for interference, as most interpreters seem to think? Why did He say that His hour was not yet come, and then a few moments later perform the miracle for the purpose of manifesting His glory (verse 11)?

We have thought of a very simple explanation providing only one word of the original could be changed. If the Greek word that stands for "not yet" were changed to the word "now," all would be simple enough. Then the meaning would be this: When Jesus' mother came to Him and informed Him that the supply of wine was exhausted, He said to her, "What is that to me and thee, woman? Mine hour is now come." This would imply no rebuke of His mother, but an understanding between Him and her, as

much as to say, "What matter it to me and thee, mother, that the wine is exhausted. My hour is come to begin my public ministry and to reveal my power. Have I not often told you that my hour would come?" That would be the reason that Mary spoke to the servants with so much confidence by saying to them, "Do whatever He commands you," for she knew that He would show forth His power in some way.

Perhaps this interpretation, simple as it is, would not be possible. It would imply that an error had in some way crept into the original in transcribing the gospel. So far as we know, there is no ancient manuscript that contains the word for "now," but all have the word for "not yet." Still we humbly venture this suggestion in order that critical scholars may continue their investigations, and sometime clear up the difficulty. According to the text as it is, we can see no satisfactory explanation of the expression, "Mine hour is not yet come."

If our interpretation should ever be established, the lesson would be that of the beautiful mutual love and confidence that existed between Jesus and His mother—a lesson to both parents and children. If the usual interpretation is the correct one, it would teach us an important doctrine, namely, that Jesus, after He reached the time for His public ministry, could no longer permit any interference with His plans on anybody's part, and His mother especially could not presume on her close relationship to Him to command Him or offer suggestions to Him; He was now and henceforth to be controlled entirely by His Father's will, not by any human will; just as He said (John 8:28): "I do nothing of myself, but as the Father hath taught me, speak I these things." Also 5:30: "I can of myself do nothing: as I hear I judge: and my judgment is righteous, because I seek not mine own will, but the will of Him that sent me." Before this time Jesus had been subject to His parents (Luke 2:51); but henceforth He was to be subject only to His Father's will; henceforth, whenever He deemed best, His true divinity was to shine forth in His speech and conduct.

What important truth do we learn from this circumstance? That there is no Biblical basis for the Roman Catholic doctrine of the Virgin Mary. Though greatly honored in being chosen of God to be the mother of Jesus on the human side, yet she is not to be worshipped, nor looked upon as a mediator between God and man or Christ and His people. Says Dr. A. Spaeth, in the Lutheran Commentary: "This is Mary's last recorded word in Scripture—a word of quiet, humble, implicit obedience and submission to her Lord and Master; a last will and protest on her part against the unscriptural exaltation bestowed upon her by medieval Mariolatry, not only dishonoring her divine Lord, but robbing that humble handmaid of God herself of her brightest jewel." Nowhere after this event did Mary ever suggest to Christ what He should do; nowhere did she ever presume to act as a mediator between Him and others.

We must now consider briefly the chief doctrine and lesson of this Epiphany of our Lord.

V. It Afforded Jesus an Occasion to Manifest His Divine Character and Power.

Verse 11 says: "This beginning of His signs did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory; and His disciples believed on Him." Here is stated the chief purpose of this miracle, which was the first one He ever performed. How significant! He did not perform any of His wonders prematurely, and thus merely excite notoriety. He waited until He was fully endued and appointed to enter upon His public ministry. The false or apocryphal lives of Jesus ascribe many miracles to Him even in His childhood, and all of them are puerile and useless. Not so the true and inspired gospels. They are sober. They record only the true miracles of Christ, showing that He performed them in a sober way, and for the purpose of doing good and manifesting His divinity, and not merely to excite amazement.

It was eminently proper, too, that His first miracle should be one connected with nature; it proved that He was the Sovereign of the natural realm, its Creator. Who could

turn water into wine in this sudden and miraculous way but the God who made nature and who is constantly turning water into wine by natural processes. Why, He is the only one who understands those marvelous processes, the only one who is able to command them at will. Hence this miracle proves Christ's divinity. Afterward He proved, by casting out demons, that He was also complete Master over the spiritual and invisible realm.

Christ's miracle at the wedding contains the promise and prophecy of the time when nature itself shall be transformed and glorified. Its present imperfect form shall be destroyed (2 Pet. 3:10-12), but its true essence shall emerge by the power and grace of God, and then there shall be "new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness" (2 Pet. 3:13). Then, as Paul phrases it, the whole creation shall "be delivered into the glorious liberty of the children of God" (Rom. 8:18-23).

XII

THE THIRD SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

CHRIST AND THE LEPER

Text: Matt. 8:1-13

How replete with suggestion are all these Epiphany lessons from the gospels! Today we have one of the most beautiful and inspiring of these manifestations of Christ's power and grace. At the close of the sermon on the mount Jesus came down to the plain, where work of a practical character was awaiting Him. He did not shrink from it. After the sermon comes pastoral care and practical work. The two ought always to go together. No minister ought to think that his whole duty is done when he has stood in the pulpit and preached the gospel. To preach is very important indeed, but the application and practice of the preaching is no less important. Thus we see that these gospel lessons are suggestive for us ministers as well as for our people. Yes, the gospel is as varied as are the needs and conditions of human life.

Now let us make this Epiphany Scripture our teacher, and see into what fruitful fields of instruction it will lead us. We will note—

I. The Leper's Part in the Incident.

When Jesus came down from the mountain, the gospel says: "And behold, there came to Him a leper, and worshipped Him, saying, Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean." What humble and submissive faith this request indicates, coupled with earnest desire! The leper did not doubt Jesus' power, but he was not sure it would be according to the Lord's will that he should be healed. One can almost read the poor man's thought: perhaps the Lord would think it better for him to suffer and die from his disease than to be cured.

Here is a lesson for us to-day. In all cases of sickness we should always add, "If it be thy will." Sometimes God wants us to *suffer* His will; at other times He knows that it is best to restore us to health. We cannot always tell which is the better. Although Jesus in this case healed the leper, there came a time afterward when this same leper became ill and died, and the Lord did not heal him. This incident ought to cure us of all fanaticism respecting faith healing, and we ought to learn to be submissive to God's will rather than to think that, if we just had enough faith, God would heal all our sicknesses. There is no such promise in the Bible; for we know that all the men and women who were healed, or raised from the dead by our Lord for a special purpose, afterward met with their last fatal sickness or accident or martyrdom.

There is, then, in this lesson an implicit rebuke of those people, like the Faith Healers and Christian Scientists, who think that every sick person can be restored to health, if men only have enough faith or enough power of mental suggestion. But that is not true Christian faith; it is presumption; it refuses to say, as Christ did in Gethsemane, "Thy will, not mine, be done." The Scripture itself declares that "it is appointed unto men once to die, and after this the judgment" (Heb. 9:27). Christ also died, according to the will of God, and so did all His apostles. Was it because they lacked faith? Certainly not, but because it was the divine will for them to die, when God saw that their work on earth was done. Even Mrs. Eddy, with all her pretended power over both life and death, at last had to follow in the inevitable way of all men. The Bible teaches us plainly that death, "the last enemy," will be destroyed by the final resurrection (1 Cor. 15:26), and not by faith cures and mental manipulations. It is, indeed, right for us to pray for the recovery of the sick (James 5:14), but such supplication must always be qualified by submission to the divine will and wisdom. Because Christ could perform such miracles of healing at will, is no reason for thinking that we poor human beings have been endued with the same power. This leads us to consider next—

II. Christ's Part in this Epiphany.

1. Note His calm, sure *consciousness of divine power.* There was no doubt, no hesitancy, in His act. He simply stretched forth His hand, and touched the leper, and said, "I will; be thou clean." No fear had Christ of the infection of the disease. What consciousness here of divine power, and therefore of immunity from the most deadly contagion? Everything that Christ did proved His consciousness of His divine power. There was no hesitancy, no fear, no doubt, but complete mastery of the situation in every case. Yet there are critics today who try to analyze all consciousness of divinity out of the mind of Christ!

In answer to the man's appeal of humble faith Christ replied, "I will: be thou clean." Immediately the leprosy was cleansed away. What supreme mastery over physical disease our Lord here shows! He had no need to pray, to appeal to any other power than His own. He said: "*I* will." In all His miracles this same consciousness of having perfect command of the forces of nature and of spirit is vividly shown. He simply commanded the wind and the waves, and they obeyed Him. The only way to eliminate this consciousness of divinity from the mind of Christ is to deny the historical character of the gospel narratives.

2. Worthy of special attention is *Christ's instruction to the leper after he was healed.* This command may seem strange to some persons who read the narrative hastily. But when we stop to think of it more deeply, we find that it was the only proper word to say to the man under the circumstances. Christ said to him: "See thou tell no man; but go, show thyself to the priest," etc. Why this prohibition? Would not the publication of this great miracle be a proof to the people of Christ's divinity and Messiahship?

First, Christ here observed the Levitical law respecting lepers. (See Lev. 13:49 and 14:2 ff.) This proves Christ's deference to the Old Testament dispensation and law. He was no revolutionist. Had He said to the leper: "Go bruit abroad the fact that you have been healed by me; spread it

as far as you can; never mind the Levitical law and the authority of the priests," He would have proved Himself irregular, individualistic, disorderly, fanatical. But just observe how sober and calm He is. He was a Jew; He was living and working among the Jews; He knew that the Levitical law, though of a temporary character, was still divine and in force. How sensible it was to send the leper to the priest in the regular way, and have the proper official pronounce the leprosy perfectly cleansed away! Thus Christ shows His deference to the past, His subjection to the law, and His belief in the divine character of the Old Testament regulations. "Thus it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness," He said to John at His baptism. Christ was no radical.

In another respect Christ proves His sane and well-balanced character. His command, "See thou tell no man," shows that He did not want to gain too much publicity by mere outward wonders. While His miracles had their place in proving that He was divine, He was chary about causing the people to make too much out of the merely physical and wonder-stirring. He was a true miracle worker, but no miracle *monger*. At times He tried to divert attention from His miracles, so that He would have time to lay the basis of the gospel plan of redemption in proper instruction. How well He gaged the tendencies of human nature! Had he performed miracles indiscriminately, had He not exercised due economy in such exhibitions, He would not have had time to give proper instructions to His apostles and the people, and that would have been fatal to His cause. But with the proper proportion of the miraculous organically connected with much clear and positive instruction, He laid a deep and solid foundation for faith in Him as the world's Redeemer. Today we really depend on His teaching more than on His power to do outward wonders.

May all of us know in our hearts, through the witness of the Spirit and the teaching of the Word, that we are God's redeemed children, even when we see that it is not His will to heal our physical maladies!

XIII

THE FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

MASTER OF WIND AND WAVE

Text: Matt. 8:23-26

Perhaps some of you have been in a storm on the sea. If you have, you can sympathize with the disciples of Christ in their experience in the storm on the sea of Galilee, as it is narrated in our gospel lesson for today.

This little sea, only about twelve miles long and five to six miles wide, was especially subject to sudden and violent storms. It lay in the heart of the hills, far below the level of the ocean, and when the sun heated the atmosphere hanging over it, the air would rise, as warm air always does, and then the cold air from the mountain ravines to the north would suddenly rush in to fill the vacated space, and thus the little sheet of water would be tossed and torn. Then woe to a vessel that was caught in its power! These tempests often came so unexpectedly that it was impossible to forecast them.

In such a tempest Christ and His disciples were caught as they were passing in a little ship from the western to the eastern side of the sea. The waves rolled so high that the ship was covered by them. The disciples were sore distressed; but Christ lay sleeping calmly in the hold of the ship. Then they awoke Him, saying, "Master, Master, carest thou not that we perish?" He arose, rebuked the disciples for their want of faith, stepped out upon the prow of the vessel, said to the storm, "Peace, be still," and the wind ceased, and the waves lay down as level as glass, and there was a great calm. Thus Christ proved Himself master of the wind and waves. No wonder the disciples marvelled, and said, "What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey Him?"

Now let us learn what valuable lessons this occurence teaches us respecting Christ and His saving power.

I. How Human Jesus Was!

His days had been full of toil, and now He was weary. So, like one of us, He lay down on a pillow, and fell fast asleep. So profound was His slumber that even the rising of the tempest and the excitement of His fellow-passengers did not awake Him. So far as we can understand the narrative, He was sleeping the sleep of exhaustion, just as all men do when they are worn out by strenuous toil.

How human Jesus was! The ancient confessors had studied the gospels and epistles well when they declared in the creed that He was "very man of very man." While we would not dare to say that He assumed into the person of His Godhead our weak, imperfect and sinful human nature, yet it is true, that, having assumed a perfect human nature, He was able to take upon Him, in a most real and sympathetic way, our infirmities and the consequences of our sins. That is just what the Scriptures teach (Isa. 53:4): "Surely He hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows." Or as St. Matthew puts it (8.17): "He Himself took our infirmities, and bore our sicknesses." Yes, by virtue of His incarnation and His sympathy with human experiences, Jesus was truly human.

But we must not stop with Jesus asleep in the hold of the ship. If we would understand and appreciate His true character, we must follow Him to the sequel. By doing so we shall also learn another important lesson.

II. How Divine Jesus Was!

In their terror the disciples ran to Him, and awoke Him, and cried, "Lord, save us; we perish!" By this act they proved that they had some faith in Christ and some conception of the kind of being He was. They called Him Lord, and prayed to Him to save them from the destructive power of the storm. But of course they did not have enough faith, else they would not have been frightened at all, but from the start would have trusted Him to save them.

Now let us note the conduct of Christ. There is no excitement in His action. Calmly He arises, steps forth upon the prow of the tossing vessel, stretches forth His hand, and rebukes the winds and the sea. According to St. Mark's record, He says to the agitated sea, "Peace, be still!" And there is a great calm.*

What majesty! What composure! What perfect mastery! Did any other being ever display such complete sovereignty over the wind and the waves? What kind of a person alone could speak thus to the elements, and they would obey? We say that only a divine Person could do this; only the Person who made the elements, and therefore, understood their composition. Science teaches us that matter is composed of atoms and molecules. What a tremendous agitation of these constituents there must be in a tempest of wind and wave! What power in the pressure of the howling wind and the lashing sea! Yet Christ stilled the storm in one moment by a simple command.

How could He perform this wonder! It is very simple if you accept the doctrine of the Deity of Jesus Christ. He who made the atoms and molecules, and so understood their constitution and their mutual relations, could very easily speak the word and exert the power that would cause them to slip back liquidly into their normal condition. It would be as easy for Him to do this as for you to stop the trembling of a leaf of clover or the petal of a flower. But do you realize that only One who was divine could so command the wind and the sea into obedience? Therefore Jesus Christ was a divine Being. He was God and man in one person. As man He grew weary and fell asleep; as God He rose and composed the raging storm.

*We take the gospel narrative to be true. We believe it with all heart. No one but an inspired person could write such a narrative and in such a simple, dignified way. Had it been told by a writer of fiction, it would have been distorted, over-decorated; the temptation to enter into detail and to engage in exclamation and elaboration would have been too great for one who was composing fiction. Read the minute descriptions of some of the Biblical miracles in the stories written by the writers of fiction founded on Biblical incidents, like George Ebers, Lew Wallace and Elizabeth Stuart Phelps Ward; and note the difference between fiction and inspired history.

Let us ask this relevant question: Why did Christ perform this miracle? Does it hold a necessary place in God's plan of redeeming power and love? It does. Note: Christ turned water into wine in His first miracle. This proved His mastery over nature in its vegetable form, in the quiet methods of gradual, growing processes. He also multiplied the loaves and the fishes in feeding the thousands, which evinced His power over nature in gathering to itself material from the resources around it. But was He complete master of the forces of nature when they were agitated and wild and thrown into convulsions? The miracle of today's lesson proves the He was. Yes, He is the Lord of nature, for He created the natural realm. Being its Creator and Master, He is able to subdue, control, redeem and glorify it, and make it a fit habitation for man when he receives his resurrected and glorified body.

Having now seen that Jesus was truly human and divine, we are ready to reflect on the last division of our theme:

III. How Completely We May Confide in Jesus!

Being a historical narrative, it shows how wonderfully the divine and human were correlated in the person of Christ. How naturally He lies sleeping in the hold of the ship; then awakes and rebukes His disciples; then calms the winds and waves! Could there be anything more simple and at the same time more majestic and wonderful? It is the same person—the one who lay asleep a moment ago and the one who now commands the wind to cease and the waves to be calm. Oh, the wonderful communion of attributes, divine and human, in the person of our Lord! It is perfect union, perfect communion, perfect interplay, but no confusion, no transmutation. Both the human and the divine have their part to perform in every act, so that they act conjointly, harmoniously. There is no schism in this divine-human Person. Now what follows from this doctrine?

1. Since He was human, we may be *assured of His sympathy*. If you met with a great sorrow, you would not

go for comfort to some giddy person who had never had a real trial in his life, but rather to one who had suffered as you have; then you could talk your afflictions over and afford mutual consolation. What a fellow-feeling it gives us with Jesus to realize that He knows by actual experience all about our human joys and sorrows! That is why we can sing in connection with every experience, "Take it to the Lord in prayer."

No doubt, Christ as purely divine, could have sympathized with us; indeed, He must have done so, else He would not have come down to the earth, assumed our nature into His Godhead, and atoned for our sins. But we could not have felt Him so near us, so much a part of our very lives, so fully in touch with us, had He never taken our very nature and passed through the whole gamut of human experience. It often happens that when we go to a friend and tell him our troubles, he replies, "Yes, I know just how you feel; I have had the same experience myself." So it is with the human Jesus when we go to Him with our trials. This is the meaning of that great and assuaging statement of the inspired writer (Heb. 4:15): "We have not an high priest who cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, but one who was tempted in all points like as we are, yet without sin."

2. Assured of His sympathy, we may also be *sure of His help,* if He has the power to help us. Ah! *He has the power, too,* for, as we have seen, *He is divine* as well as human. He proved it by His mastery over the wind and the waves. Sympathy and power! What great words are they! They mean help for us in every time of need. He who stilled the tempest on Galilee can quiet every storm. Whether on sea or land, He is the Master of the elements.

It may be true that He will not calm every material storm, and save us physically from its destructive forces. That might not always be according to His will, nor for our highest good; but we may know from this lesson that He can if it is best for us. Of this we may be sure: though

the body might perish in a storm, the soul would still be secure in the sovereign care of our Lord and Redeemer.

A beautiful spiritual application may be made of this miracle; for a miracle in nature is often a parable of what Christ does in the spiritual realm. He said, "Peace, be still," to storm-tossed Galilee, "and there was a great calm." So when a tempest of grief is raging in our hearts, we may hear His reassuring voice, "Peace, be still," and a calm will also come to us. Let us trust Him fully. May it never be necessary for Him to rebuke us by saying, "Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith!"

"Oh, for a faith that will not shrink,
Though pressed by every foe;
That will not tremble on the brink
Of any earthly woe!

"That will not murmur nor complain
Beneath the chastening rod,
But in the hour of grief or pain,
Will lean upon its God,—

"A faith that keeps the narrow way
Till life's last hour is fled,
And with a pure and heavenly ray
Lights up a dying bed.

"Lord, give us such a faith as this,
And then, whate'er may come,
We'll taste, e'en here, the hallowed bliss
Of an eternal home."

XIV

THE FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

WHEAT AND TARES IN THE FIELD

Text: Matt. 13:24-30

Wherever you find the good, there the evil also appears. An old adage runs thus: "Wherever God erects a church, there Satan builds a chapel alongside." Sometimes it may even occur that the chapel belongs to God and the church to Satan.

Today we have to interpret the parable of the wheat and the tares, which illustrates the truth just stated, that good and evil are mingled together everywhere in this world. The householder sowed good seed in his field, but an enemy came along stealthily by night, and sowed tares in with the good seed. Let us try to find out the inner meaning of this parable by considering the wheat and the tares together. But before we go further we should explain that this is one of the only two parables that Christ Himself ever interpreted for His disciples. Hence we can the more readily find the key to its meaning. The tares were a species of darnel, sometimes called "cheat," which very closely resembled the wheat until both had developed to some degree of maturity. Let us consider—

I. What the Wheat and the Tares Symbolize.

Our Lord Himself, in His explication of the parable, says that "the field is the world." Therefore, it would be incorrect to say that the wheat and tares were sown in the Church. Then He said, "The good seeds are the sons of the kingdom; but the tares are the sons of the evil one." In the parable of the sower the seed represents the Word of God, which is sown in the soil of different kinds of hearts; while in our parable for today the seeds stand for different kinds of people. This diversity in explaining these two

parables teaches us that, in interpreting the parables of the Bible, we should always seize upon the main points of comparison, and should not try to make a parable illustrate too many points.

Now let us learn that good and true people, symbolized by the wheat, are God's children. "Every good and perfect gift cometh down from the Father of lights." God is the source of all good and of no evil whatever; therefore every real Christian is a child of God; he belongs to Him; and if he is a child of God, then he is an heir of God, and a joint-heir with Jesus Christ. So we may say that if you and I belong to God, then God and all He possesses belong to us. How great and how precious is our heritage! No doubt that is what is meant when Paul said, "All things are yours." Christ made the same kind of promises: "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of God."

On the other hand, the tares represent the children of the evil one. Those who are evil in mind and practice cannot be the children of God, for He is the source of the good only. "He is of purer eyes even than to look upon evil." While God has created all beings, and originally made them good, yet those who permit the evil one to inject his spirit into them and lead them in the way of sin are virtually children and disciples, not of God, but of the evil one. They bring forth corrupt fruit, which always comes from a corrupt source.

Who would want to be the children of the evil one, who brought all our sins and woes into the world? Who would not want to be the child of God, the author of all good and of every blessing? To which of these two families do you and I belong?

II. Who Sows the Wheat and the Tares.

Who are the sowers in this parable is evident from what has already been said. If the wheat represents the children of the kingdom of God, them the sower must represent God Himself, who is the Creator and Preserver of all who trust

Him and do His will. God always sows good seed in His field.

But who sows the bad seed, the tares? When the servants of the householder came to him and said, "Sir, didst thou not not sow good seed in thy field? Whence, then, hath it tares?" He replied, "An enemy hath done this." Ah, yes! "An enemy!" It is "an enemy" who sows all the bad seed in the world, an arch enemy, one who hates God and everything good; an enemy who is truculent, filled with revenge, desiring to do all the despite he can to God's fair creation. His antagonism to God is of the most malignant and vindictive character.

Who is this enemy? Christ Himself tells us later on in this chapter when He gives the interpretation of the parable. He says (verses 38, 39): "But the tares are the children of the wicked one; the enemy that sowed them is the devil."

So Jesus taught that there is such an evil being as the devil. He said that the devil is a liar from the beginning and the father of lies. In one place He said to the evil-minded Jews, "Ye are of your father, the devil." Several times He called the evil one Beelzebub and Satan. And Satan means an adversary who is the "enemy" of our text. Whatever else may be said, we may be sure that those liberals who reject the doctrine of the devil do not agree with the Master's theology; nor, indeed, with that taught in the whole Bible.

Reason and observation corroborate the doctrine that there is a real personal evil spirit in the world, and that he is the source of all evil. The evil in the world is largely moral evil; it is not solely, nor even mainly, physical. Hence unless God created evil—which is a monstrous doctrine—there must have been an evil personal being who originated sin and who is back of its propagation. The evil in the world is too malevolent, too persistent, too fundamental, to be the result of a mere lapse or accident or defective principle. The only adequate explanation of evil, considering its moral character and baleful effects, is a personal evil spirit. Christ's theology is the correct theology.

If evil were only a misfortune, it would never fill the soul with bitter hatred and a desire for revenge; it would never lead a person to sow bad seed in another person's field purely out of spite. It would only make us sad and miserable, not wicked.

Let us not be led astray by the speculations of the day which try to minimize sin by denying the existence of a personal devil. This is one of Satan's wiles—to get men to believe that he is not a reality, so that they will not be afraid of him. As a rule, people who deny his reality make light of sin, and therefore, do not feel that they need an atoning and divine Saviour. That is precisely Satan's scheme. He even tried to lead Christ to doubt that He was the Son of God. No wonder he tries to make us believe the same! And, to crown all his seductions, he tries to delude us into believing that he himself is non-existent! Our only safe refuge, when we see or experience evil, is to remember that "an enemy hath done this," and thus be on our guard against his sly and secret wiles.

III. How the Wheat and the Tares Agree and How They Differ.

When they first spring up, the wheat and the tares look practically alike, so that many persons would not be able to distinguish them. So it is among people. You cannot always discern between the good and the bad, the true and the false. Hypocrites may disguise themselves successfully for a time. Christ says that they are wolves in sheep's clothing. Even Satan may put on the guise of "an angel of light." So may his followers. You may go into a church, and may not be able to differentiate between the wheat and cheat.

However, there is a difference between them. Its source is in the seed though it may not be manifest until the fruit appears. After the darnel has come to a head, it can no longer simulate the appearance of wheat; then it reveals its true character.

So it is in human life. Those who are true Christians will be manifest sooner or later, and those who are false will

sooner or later expose themselves. "By their fruits ye shall know them." The disguise of the hypocrite will soon drop away, and his real character will stand exposed. The hair and paw of the wolf will show themselves beneath the sheep's fleece. Deceit is a garment that is hard to keep on; it slips off in an unguarded moment. Tare seed can never produce wheat.

IV. Why the Wheat and the Tares are Permitted to Grow Together.

The servants of the householder proposed to go out into the field at once and gather up the tares; but the householder would not permit this. "Lest, while ye gather up the tares," he said, "ye root up also the wheat with them."

What does this mean? Some interpreters apply it to the Church, in which, they hold, no discipline on false professors of religion should be administered. But that is a wrong explanation. Christ said, "The field is the world," not the Church. In another place He expressly commanded church discipline on a wicked and impenitent member. In the case of an offending brother, who, after a couple of earnest admonitions, will not repent, he is to be brought before the Church; "and if he will not hear the Church, let him be unto you as a publican and a sinner." Christ would not have said something there in direct contradiction to His teaching in the parable before us.

What, then, did Christ mean by saying that the wheat and the tares should grow together? He meant to forestall all persecution; to teach that in His kingdom force should never be used; that His people should never destroy the wicked and heretical, and thus make themselves the determiners of men's eternal destiny. Christian people must not take the lives of people because they will not believe the gospel. They must let the wheat and tares grow together in this world until the time comes when those who are competent shall gather them out of the field.

If only the Christian Church had always remembered the explicit teaching of this parable, how much evil would

have been avoided! No martyrs would have even been burned at the stake; never would there have been a Spanish Inquisition, nor a Saint Bartholomew's Day. Think of all the martyrs who have been slain in direct opposition to Christ's teaching! What a pity that the Church has so often forgotten its commission to preach, teach, exhort and persuade, but never to persecute or invoke the arm of force! And how lamentably true it is that, in trying to gather out the tares, persecutors have always rooted up much of the wheat! It is a historical fact that, whenever the Church has resorted to violent methods, she has rooted up more wheat than tares. We are glad that Luther always advised against the use of force to convert people to Christianity. He declared that, if the heretic could not be converted by preaching and teaching, he should be left in God's hands; he should not be persecuted or driven by force. God alone could adjudge his case, and administer the merited punishment. This leads to our last point.

V. When the Wheat and Tares are to be Separated.

Christ said, "at the end of the world." Yes, some things must be deferred until then, however much we may wish to pronounce and execute judgment. Men are too prone to judge. They seem to want to usurp the place of the Supreme Judge of the world.

But how fortunate it is that we need not bear the responsibility of pronouncing eternal judgment on any man, and need not separate the good from the bad! How many errors we would make! No; instead of doing such work, we shall ourselves be among those who are judged. To the angels, who have a keener vision than we, shall be entrusted the great and responsible task of separating the wheat from the tares.

But then the great assize will come. There will be "a day of the Lord," a great and terrible day. The tares shall be gathered out infallibly from the wheat, and shall be cast into the furnace. On the other hand, the wheat shall be gathered into barns. The good and the bad shall not always

grow together. The present economy will one day come to an end. "Then," says our Lord, in interpreting our parable, "shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father." Ah, but "all things that offend, and them that do iniquity, shall be cast into a furnace; there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth."

Shall you and I be wheat or tares on that day? Do you ask whether it is possible for the tares to be changed into wheat? Yes! But only by a miracle of grace—the miracle of conversion. Before the harvest comes, there is hope. "Therefore, turn ye, turn ye, for why will ye die?"

XV

THE SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

A FOREGLEAM OF COMING GLORY

Text: Matt. 17:1-9

The scene on Mount Hermon when our Lord was transfigured contains a whole body of divinity. Almost every Christian doctrine is either set forth directly there, or may be clearly and logically inferred. Let us see how filled with holy doctrine it is.

I. The Holy Doctrines of the Transfiguration.

1. *About God.*

It teaches the existence of God, for God spoke from the cloud; also His preservation of the world and His care for individuals, or His general and special providence. Granted such a God, it is easy to reason back to special creation, for a God of pure evolution would not exercise such special and individual oversight. This scene likewise teaches the doctrines of special divine revelation, and thereby leads to the inspiration of the Holy Scriptures. From it you may also gather the doctrines of God's transcendence and immanence.

2. *About Christ and Redemption.*

The doctrines of redemption through Christ are all wrapped up in this pregnant incident. The heavenly voice said, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye Him." A divine endorsement of Christ carrying with it the incarnation, obedience and sacrifice of Christ—in short, the whole redemptive work of our Lord. In it the central doctrine of the plan of redeeming grace is explicitly set forth, for Christ and Moses and Elijah were talking together about the death of Christ, which He was to accomplish in Jerusalem. The atoning sacrifice was the chief topic of conversation between Christ and His heavenly visit-

ants. They did not slight that event; they did not say, "We are not saved by the death of Christ, but by His life." No; Christ's death was shown to be the pivot of all redemptive grace and power. This fact also carries with it the doctrine of man's sinfulness; indeed, his total depravity; for if He could have saved Himself, no atonement on the cross would have been needed. It also teaches that man needs enlightenment in order to be saved, in order to exercise faith: "Hear ye Him." Christ's fulfillment of both the law and the prophets is also clearly shown in this event.

3. *About Christ's Person.*

Both Christ's divinity and humanity are here indicated. His humanity is plainly shown by His fleshly character, by the clothes He wore, by the human speech He used; His divinity by the glory that shone out of His person so that His face gleamed, and even His raiment became almost too bright to be looked upon by human eyes. For the most part, His divinity was veiled during His humiliation, but here it was permitted to shine forth, to show the disciples that He was more than human. Here is also an earnest and prophecy of the glorified state of Christ, when at His exaltation to the right hand of God, He was filled with all the divine fullness; and as we are to be like Him, we have here also a glimpse of the glory which shall be revealed in us, when we shall see Him as He is.

4. *About the State of the Dead.*

The present state of the dead is also clearly indicated in this strategic scene. Moses and Elijah appeared. Yet Moses had died over a thousand years before, and Elijah had ascended to heaven centuries prior; but here they are in their own persons, cognizant of the divine plan of redemption, conversing with Jesus about it, acknowledging Christ as the only begotten Son of God, everything showing that they were on the most familiar terms with Christ. This affords most incontestible proof that there is an intermediate state, and that the soul does not sleep between death and the resurrection. Note, again, that Moses had died, leaving

his body on the earth, for the Bible says that Jehovah buried him; but Elijah was translated to heaven without death. Yet here both appear in bodily form—a proof that God at the resurrection can give to our disembodied spirits a body that will suit them. There is no distinction made here between the bodily appearance of Moses and Elijah. Glimpses, these, of a most wonderful and blessed eschatology—resurrection and eternal glory both for body and soul.

Then there was mutual recognition. Not only did Christ, Moses and Elijah know one another, but even the disciples recognized the lawgiver and the prophet whom they had never seen. The doctrine of heavenly recognition. More light on the "last things."

5. *About Glorified Material.*

We may also learn something about the Biblical doctrine of material substance in its glorified form. While Christ still retained the essence of His corporeal nature, and while that of His garments still remained intact, yet both became too glorious for earthly vision to endure. His face and His clothing shone more brightly than the sun. The transfiguration scene, therefore, foreshadowed the coming state of the glorification of material substance. So we need not stumble over the doctrine of the literal resurrection of our bodies. The event on the holy mount proves that in glorification the essence of the body is not destroyed, but its character and form are simply transfigured with divine beauty and glory.

See the clear hints of the glorified state in the natural world: The coarse and homely lily bulb is changed into a lovely flower by God's operation through the processes of nature; the charcoal, black and unsightly, becomes, by the process of crystallization, a brilliant diamond. On the last day what will not God make of this material world and the bodies of His saints? May we be among those who will be glorified, our bodies made "like unto His own glorious body!"

II. The Inspiring Lessons of the Transfiguration.

1. *It Gives Assurance and Hope.*

What was one great purpose of this scene? To afford the three disciples a foregleam of the coming glory of our Lord when He should ascend to "the right hand of the Majesty on high." After the transfiguration, whenever doubt and discouragement came, they would reason in this way: If our Lord appeared so glorious even when He was transfigured for a few moments here on earth, what must be His wonderful estate now that He has "ascended far above all heavens," and has been filled with all the fullness of the Deity? Would not such a reflection give them reassured confidence in His power, grace and majesty? No wonder, that after they understood it all, they went forth with fearless courage to preach Christ crucified, risen and ascended! With what calm assurance John afterward rehearsed this event: "And we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father!" Since you and I know that this event took place, it gives to us the same assurance of faith.

2. *It Gives Strength for Our Every-day Work.*

Peter proposed to build three tabernacles, so that he could keep Christ and the celestial visitors there as long as possible; but this wish was not granted. The dead, therefore, are not to come back often and remain with us, but are for the most part to be left undisturbed in their heavenly bliss. Yet they are interested in our affairs, and know at least in general that God has provided for the salvation of the world. Peter wanted to remain on the mount of transfiguration, in enjoyment of the ecstasy of his feeling. Not so; there was work for him and his fellow-disciples down in the valley. We cannot always be living in a state of spiritual transport; it would unfit us for the duties of this work-day world. Now and then we may have such mountain experiences; then we must come down and use our strength and inspiration in doing our common, every-day work for Christ and our fellowmen.

XVI

SEPTUAGESIMA SUNDAY

WORKING IN CHRIST'S VINEYARD

Text: Matt. 20:1-16

Our lesson for today is the parable of the laborers in the vineyard. According to the first verse, Christ intended by this parable to illustrate certain features of the kingdom of heaven. In the preceding chapter we have the narrative of the rich young man who was unwilling to give his possessions to the poor and follow Christ. He was trying to be good in his own way, the legalistic and bargaining way; and so, when the test came demanding him to be good through faith and love, he failed. Then the disciples fell into the same fault. Peter said to Jesus: "Lo, we have left all, and followed thee; what shall we receive therefor?" You see here again the selfish, bargaining spirit. In view of this mercenary temper, Christ spoke to His disciples the parable of the laborers in the vineyard. That this is the connection is proved by the preposition "for" at the beginning of the parable.

Many people have had difficulty in interpreting this parable; so the first thing we must do is to explain its true purpose and meaning.

I. The Interpretation of the Parable.

1. Some people think it teaches justification by works. The Roman Catholics are apt to make use of it to establish their doctrine. Perhaps a little color is given for this interpretation by the use of the words "hire" and "wages." But that is the wrong explanation. The parable teaches the very opposite doctrine—that is, it rebukes the bargaining, mercenary spirit, which works only for reward, by showing that the householder had a right to do with his goods as he pleased, and by his giving the same wages to those who be-

gan to work late in the day as to those who began early; also by his rebuking those who complained that they had not received more than their fellow-workmen. If salvation were to be earned by men's good works, surely the householder would have paid his workmen according to the number of hours they toiled. No other method would have been just.

Thus Christ means to teach by this parable that working in His vineyard is not regulated by the same principles as those which prevail when men work for one another in the human world for wages. He rewards according to the principle of grace and not of human merit.

In interpreting Scripture we must observe this rule: that each passage is to be explained in the light of the whole teaching of the Bible. Now note: long before Jesus spoke this parable He had proclaimed, "Repent ye, and believe the gospel; for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Therefore, He had told His disciples, no doubt many times, that they must first repent and have faith before they can enter His vineyard at all to labor there. So here in this parable: the very call to go and work in Christ's vineyard is, first of all, a call to faith; for if men do not first have faith in Him, they will not heed His invitation. It is not a matter of merit, but of grace, to be called into Christ's vineyard to labor for Him. Did those men standing there idle in the market merit anything from the householder? Were they not only too glad to be employed, so that they might acquire something with which to keep themselves and their families alive? Then those who came later declared that they stood there idle because no one had come to employ them. Thus the whole parable is put upon the basis of grace, and is breathed through and through with the spirit of grace.

2. What is meant by the "penny" in the parable? It is better to call it a shilling. The Greek word is *denarius*, and was worth about seventeen cents. Many interpreters have labored to define the precise point in the plan of salvation that is meant by the shilling. Perhaps it does not mean anything specific, but *any* blessing that comes to a disciple when he works for Christ. You and I never do any work

for Christ, out of the motive of faith and love, but we receive a blessing that is out of all proportion to the amount of service we do.

But note, on the other hand, if our motives are selfish and sordid, even though mingled with some faith, our blessing will be proportionately small, just as the men in the parable who were first employed, and who were thinking chiefly of the wages, received only a shilling for the whole day's work; while those who were engaged at the eleventh hour, who were so glad and grateful to be employed at all, who made no bargain with the householder, but left the reward entirely to his liberality—these received the large reward of a shilling, even though they had worked only one hour of the day. This treatment proves again that the reward was one of grace and not of merit. Taking the motives of those first employed into consideration, they received much more than they deserved; indeed, on that ground, they deserved nothing.

Thus we see that the very purpose of this parable is to rebuke the legalistic temper, the spirit of self-righteousness, which works only for reward and for wages. Thus Peter was sharply and pointedly reproved for asking the calculating question, "What shall we receive therefor?" Jesus told him, by this trenchant story, that those who are called first into His kingdom may, after all, be last (verse 16), if they seek mere selfish reward; while others, coming later but with a higher motive, may be preferred.

II. The Lessons of the Parable.

1. *Faith is the first thing.* The very fact that these men were called to work in the vineyard, and that they went, implies that the call had begotten some faith within them. Had they had no faith in the householder, they would have disregarded his invitation. Their faith may not have been very strong or very pure; nevertheless it was strong enough to lead them to go into the vineyard and labor through all the day. They did not receive a very large blessing, because their faith was not unmixed, but the householder did unto

them according to their faith (cf. Matt. 8:13; 9:29). One of Paul's deep statements will explain the status of these bargaining men (1 Cor. 3:15), where he is speaking of the various kinds of people who build on the true foundation, which is Jesus Christ (verse 11): "If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire." So faith is the first thing (Acts 16:31): "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." (Cf. John 3:14-18; Luke 16:15, 16; Heb. 11:6, and many more.)

2. *To work in Christ's kingdom is a privilege.* It is not a matter of human merit. We ought to thank God that He graciously gives us the opportunity to labor for Him. How terrible it would be to be compelled to "stand about all the day idle," and have no chance to accept God's invitation by faith, and thus to be shut out from all the blessings and joys of His kingdom! Let us thank God for His beneficent invitation to enter His service, and esteem it a privilege and not a hardship.

3. *The motive of our faith and service largely determines our status in Christ's kingdom.* Those persons who were first employed, and were counting on receiving a superior reward, were disappointed, and came last; whereas, those who came later, but left the reward entirely to the good will of their employer, received more than they expected. Thus the last became first, and the first became last. The parable, no doubt, could be applied to the Jews, who, because they were the children of Abraham, the chosen people and the first to be called, became selfish, proud and Pharisaical, and thus lost their first place in the kingdom; while the Gentiles, though called later, have been preferred. That is what Christ meant when He said (Matt. 8:11, 12): "And I say unto you, many shall come from the east and the west, and shall sit down with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven; but the sons of the kingdom shall be cast forth," etc. So we, too, may miss our salvation if we depend on our merits, and serve God merely for reward, instead of depending on the grace of God

and serving Him out of faith and gratitude; or, if we trust in Christ, and yet mix our pure faith with too much of the selfish and legalistic spirit, we will at least greatly reduce our blessing and joy in the world to come, as also in the present life.

4. Another lesson we may learn from this parable is this: *God has a right to do as He pleases with His own.* Those calculating employes first called thought they had a right to dictate the amount the householder should give them. But the householder said to him: "Is it not lawful to do what I will with mine own? Or is thine eye evil because I am good?"

Here Christ means to teach us that God knows better than we what is right and just. He will not judge any one arbitrarily, nor bestow His gifts partially and unjustly; but, being all wise, He adjudicates all things according to the law of righteousness, weighing each man's motives, circumstances and opportunities, as well as his activity and length of service. No, He will forget no man's labor of love (Heb. 6:10); but let us remember it must be a "labor of love," and not of selfish calculating for rewards above other people. Those who are ambitious for honor and emolument, who want to have the high seats at the right and left hand of the King when He comes in His glory, will be very likely to miss their goal, and will have to take a humbler place (Matt. 20:20-23). Perhaps the Father will give those positions to some very humble persons who never expected it, but served only out of gratitude and love to God for His grace.

May God cleanse all our hearts from self-righteousness and sordid motives!

XVII

SEXAGESIMA SUNDAY

SEED AND SOIL

Text: Luke 8:4-15

For our gospel lesson today we shall study together the well-known parable of the sower who sowed the same kind of seed on different kinds of soil. It is one of the only two parables which Christ Himself interpreted for His disciples. The other one is the parable of the wheat and the tares, which we studied on the fifth Sunday after Epiphany.

Let us first point out the place and meaning of the parable in the plan of redemption. It is intended to teach us that our salvation depends on the attitude of our hearts toward God's Word, especially in its revelation of Christ to us. If we, by faith, receive Christ and His Word into good and honest hearts, we shall be saved and bear abundant fruit in our lives; if we do not thus receive Him, we shall be lost and fruitless.

However, let us remember that our heart attitude toward Christ is not the *meriting cause* of our salvation, but the *divinely prescribed condition.* You may accept a benefaction which you in nowise deserve, and yet your acceptance of it may be a necessary condition of your receiving it; for if you rejected it, you could not have it.

It is worthy of notice that very different results came from the sowing of the seed. In what did the difference consist? We must earnestly think about that question.

I. The Difference Was Not in the Seed.

The farmer went forth scattering everywhere the same kind of seed. No doubt Christ, when He was a youth, often watched the farmers sowing in their fields. Perhaps some of us, in days gone by, have witnessed the same kind of a pastoral scene.

Now Christ explains to us what the seed symbolizes. He says, "The seed is the Word of God." It is good seed. Every grain has the germ of saving truth and power in it. All of it has come from God, and is living seed, divinely fructified. "Every Scripture is God-breathed, and is profitable," etc. (2 Tim. 3:16). Even those parts of the Scripture which do not seem to be so important have their value. The geneological tables, which many people think so lacking in interest, have their place in proving the historical character of the plan of redemption. There are the many laws and details of the Mosaic legislation—to many people they seem so pointless and wearisome—yet they indicate God's interest in the minutest details of our lives, showing that He cares for us, insignificant as we seem to be, and is not pre-occupied with the whirling of suns, constellations and immense systems of worlds. Then Christ in some way took up all those laws into His own life and fulfilled them.

The first few chapters of the Bible are wonderful for their history and seminal truths, even though rationalists regard them as mere myths, legends and folklore. They tell us about origins—the origin of the universe, of man, of sin and of redemption—all of it vitally and historically connected with the coming of Christ, the Redeemer.

And so we might go through the Bible. There is nothing idle between its precious lids. It is all good seed, and especially important are those portions of both the Old and New Testaments which tell us about Christ and His divine-human person and His redeeming work. It is a living and a life-giving Word. Do you remember how Jesus said, "The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit and they are life?"

Now, what should be our attitude toward this divine Word? Ought we not to open our hearts to it, and let it sink deeply into them, like seed falling into deep, rich soil? Says James (1:21): "Receive with meekness the engrafted Word, which is able to save your souls." Yet how diverse are the results of the sowing of the divine seed! As Paul

says, the gospel is a savor of life unto life to some and of death unto death to others. What makes the difference?

II. The Difference is in the Soil.

1. There was the seed that fell *by the wayside.* What a pity that such good seed should fall on such poor soil and be wasted! The wayside was trodden down hard by the feet of passing men and beasts, so that the seed remained on top instead of sinking into it. Exposed there on the surface, the birds soon came and picked it up.

Now who are these wayside hearers? According to Christ's interpretation, they are the careless, indifferent hearers, who may listen to the Word of God, but do not meditate upon it, do not pay earnest heed to it, do not cover it over, and cherish, and give it a chance to germinate and grow in their hearts. Lying there exposed on the top of the careless mind, it is readily seen, and so the evil one soon comes and carries away the good seed of the Word.

How many such hearers there are in the world! Sometimes they are in the church service, but pay so little attention to the preaching of the Word that, as the proverb says, "It goes in one ear and out the other." They are thinking of something else rather than of God's Word—of the last or next party or ball, of the latest fashion, of the last morsel of gossip, or perhaps of the last business transaction. Such hearers render the Word of God unfruitful. Lack of attention is the cause of lack of impression.

But not all such hearers are in God's house; no, nor the majority of them. They are lounging on the streets or in in their homes; they hear the church bells calling them to worship; they see children and their parents going to the Sunday school and church services; perhaps a Christian invites them to God's house. All these are ways by which God is trying to bring His Word to their attention; but they heed not; or if for a moment their attention is arrested, they brush aside the thought and continue in their indifferentism. But remember, for all this neglect of God's gracious invitations they will some day have to give an account.

2. Who are represented by the seed that *fell on the rock?* Here the soil was very shallow, and under certain circumstances seed would grow up very rapidly; but, having no depth of earth, it would soon wilt down and die in the heat of the sunshine.

What a vivid picture this is of those shallow, emotional people who grow excited for a little while over religion, especially under stirring, sensational preaching or high-pressure revivals! But, alas! they soon lose their fervor by mere reaction or under stress of trial, and grow worse than they were before.

3. Some of the seed *fell among thorns.* The soil was fertile enough, and might have borne much fruit; but the thorns, growing faster than the grain, choked it and made it unfruitful. You and I have often seen wheat, oats and corn thus choked in fields infested by weeds and thistles.

Our Lord explains that the thorns stand for the "cares and riches and pleasures of this life." What a true and graphic picture! There are so many people whose minds would make good soil for God's Word; but alas! they become absorbed in worldly cares, or the accumulation of wealth, or the pursuit of pleasure, and these crowd and choke the Word, so that it can "bring no fruit to perfection." It is not that riches in themselves are wrong, or that we may not enjoy the right kind of pleasure. No; that is not the trouble. The trouble is that men become so engrossed in the pursuit of wealth and pleasure that they lose their interest in God's Word and spiritual things, and thus gradually grow worldly minded and unfruitful in the kingdom of God. "No man can serve two masters," said Christ. "Ye cannot serve God and mammon." No; if you cannot make mammon, which means money or wealth, serve God's cause, then better let it go; it becomes like thorns to you, smothering your concern in God's Word.

4. It is a pleasure to know that some of the soil of the parable *was good ground,* mellow and fertile, into whose tilth the seed sank, hid itself, germinated and grew up un-

hindered, and brought forth abundantly—Christ says, "a hundred fold." He describes this kind of ground as representing those who, "in an honest and good heart, having heard the Word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience." How wisely and carefully every word is chosen by our divine Teacher! "Honest"—we must be sincere; "good"—we must be penitent and have faith; "keep it"—that is, the Word; they do not let Satan, or affliction, or worldly cares, riches and pleasures rob them of the sacred seed of the divine Word. They "hold it fast," as the Revised Version translates here. And they "bring forth fruit with patience." They do not grow impatient, and give up when fruit does not appear at once. As Paul puts it so beautifully: "Let us not be weary in well doing, knowing that in due season we shall reap, if we faint not."

Thank God for the good seed that fell on good ground! It fills our hearts with joy and gratitude to know that God's kingdom is a success. Which of the four kinds of soil represents your heart and mine?

XVIII

QUINQUAGESIMA SUNDAY

THE DIVINE PROPHET AND HEALER

Text: Luke 18:31-43

In our gospel lessons Christ is set forth in many "living characters." As our divine Prophet—which means a teacher sent from God—He teaches us many valuable lessons in parables concerning the plan of redemption and the kingdom of God. As One endued with divine power, He performs miracles. We have already seen that He is the sovereign of the natural realm in His turning water into wine and multiplying the loaves and fishes. In today's lesson His divinity shines forth in two ways, that of prediction and that of physical healing. Both of these parts of our Quinquagesima lesson have an integral place and meaning in the divine plan of saving grace, as we shall see. Let us meditate upon these two phases of Christ's person and work.

I. The Divine Foreteller.

In the first part of the lesson we read that Jesus took His disciples aside, and forecast in their hearing what would occur to Him within a short time. Here our Lord exercised a part of His prophet office, that of prediction.

It is worth while to note how detailed are His forecasts in this instance. He said that He would "be delivered up to the Gentiles"—a prediction that was literally fulfilled; for, after the Jewish council had condemned Him for blasphemy, they carried Him to Pilate's judgment hall, and accused Him, not of blasphemy, but of rebellion against the Roman government in proclaiming Himself a king. Thus it was the Gentiles who really slew Him. Then He said that He should "be mocked, shamefully treated, and spit upon." This was fulfilled to the letter, the last-mentioned insult being a detail that only a divinely inspired person could

have taken the risk to foretell. "And they shall scourge and kill Him." Again these are minutiæ that might very well have failed if Christ had not been a true prophet; but they also were fulfilled to the letter.

But strangest of all is this: "And the third day He shall rise again." Up to that point all is darkness and gloom—betrayal, insult, scourging, death. What a marvelous prophet to add to all the ignoble treatment the prediction about His resurrection! The only explanation is that He was divine and divinely inspired, and therefore knew precisely what would occur. To human ken the most improbable and incongruous thing that could have taken place would be that one who was to be so humilitated, and even put to death, should, after all, come out victorious by a resurrection from the dead. But that is just what afterward occurred, making the phophecy all the more wonderful.

Now one of two things must be true regarding these extraordinary predictions: either the narrative is merely a legend, or else Christ was really the Son of God, as He claimed to be. The first alternative simply destroys and renders nugatory the whole system of the Christian religion, and plunges the world into the darkness of uncertainty, with no hope of deliverance from sin and woe; then the most potent power for good in the world has no foundation in truth; then all history, and that the best accredited, is untrustworthy; then we are left without a pilot and chart to guide us through life's voyage. Who would care to accept this alternative?

But if the story is not a legend, but a recital of fact, then Christ must be divine, the Saviour of the world, the Redeemer who has come, and is to come again; then the sun shines clearly from the sky upon life's pathway. Will not every one accept the second alternative?

Another interesting fact is brought out by this prophecy. It relates to the self-consciousness of Jesus, about which so much is being written today. Was Jesus conscious that He was the Messiah of the Old Testament, and that He could make redemption for the sins of the world only by the

way of suffering and death? This passage of Scripture teaches that He was; it shows plainly that He knew He was to be delivered to the Gentiles and put to death. If He knew that, He must have known that He would have to die upon a cross, for that was the method of administering capital punishment among the Gentiles, who in this case would be the Romans. Whether Jesus was always conscious of what would come to pass, or gradually came into such a consciousness, need not be discussed here; but it is plain that at this time He clearly foresaw just what would happen, so that He must have been fully conscious that He was the Suffering Servant of Jehovah foretold by Isaiah and other Old Testament prophets.

Some skeptical critics want us to believe that Jesus only foreknew in a general way that the opposition of the Jews to Him was becoming so malignant that it would result in His arrest and execution. But such rationalism does not explain the details of His prediction. How could He know that He would be given over into the hands of the Romans, that He would be spit upon and scourged? And especially how could He know that He would rise again the third day? No; we cannot permit the rationalistic spirit of the age to rob Christ of His supernatural character.

A most important doctrine of our holy religion is brought forward in Christ's wonderful prophecy—the doctrine of atonement through the death of Christ. He said to His disciples, "All things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of man shall be accomplished." A part of the prophecy to which He referred must have been the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah, for that passage gives the clearest predictions concerning the vicarious sufferings and death of the Messiah. Jesus Himself at another place (Mark 15:28, Luke 22:37) refers to this chapter when He quotes the sentence, "He shall be numbered with the transgressors." Now in that same chapter the prophet says: "He was wounded for our transgressions; He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon Him; and with His stripes we are healed" (Isa. 53:5). If

Jesus referred to that prophecy—and He surely did—He must have meant to teach the doctrine of vicarious atonement through His sufferings and death. He could have meant nothing else in connecting His coming sufferings with the forecasts of the Old Testament prophets.

Let us remember that Christ's sufferings were endured in our behalf; that He died for us, died that we might live. Without the agony of the cross the moral law of God would have remained unfulfilled and unsatisfied, and therefore God could not have saved us from our sins. Justice would have been ethical bound to visit condign punishment upon us sinners. But thanks be to God, a willing and sufficient Substitute was found who could redeem them that were under the law and reconcile sinners to God! In this prophecy Jesus taught in seminal or potential form the same holy doctrine that Paul afterward, led by the Holy Spirit, taught in the most explicit form (Rom. 4:25), saying of Christ, "Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification."

But, according to this gospel, Jesus was not only the Divine Foreteller: He was also—

II. The Divine Healer.

It is beautiful to know that our Lord, while on His way to the cross to suffer untold anguish in atoning for the sins of the whole world, stopped beneficently by the way to heal a blind man. Since Christ was "God manifest in the flesh," this incident shows that God at the same time sustains the vast universe and also cares for a poor blind beggar. Being all-wise and all-powerful, He watches over both the infinite and the infinitesimal.

Let us briefly note some of the features of Christ's dealing with poor blind Bartimeus. He was a beggar, but not too poor for Christ to stop and help him. Hearing the multitude moving along, he asked what it meant, and was told that "Jesus of Nazareth passeth by." He improved the opportunity; for He could not be sure that the great Healer would ever pass that way again. So He cried after Him.

Oh, if we today were only so anxious to be cured of our spiritual blindness, which is so much more serious than physical blindness!

The beggar worded his petition correctly, saying, "Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy on me." By calling Him the "Son of David," he recognized Jesus as the Messiah who was to come of the Jews in the way of God's ordainment. When you fall in with God's way, you will be sure of His blessing. The blind man did not say at first, "Lord, restore my sight," but, "Have mercy on me." That was the right way to put it. Mercy is what all men need. They deserve nothing but punishment for their sin. If God bestows mercy on them, that will include every other needed blessing. When some of the people rebuked the blind man for his vigorous calling after Jesus, he was not daunted, but called all the more earnestly. Christ wants us to be earnest in our prayers. Why should He care to answer them unless we really desire what we want and need?

Presently Jesus stopped and commanded the blind suppliant to be brought to Him. Is it not curious that Jesus asked him the question, "What wilt thou that I shall do unto thee?" Could He not see what the blind man wanted? Yes, but he wanted him to put his desire into definite form, to be clear and specific. Just so we often are too general and vague in our prayers. We hardly know ourselves what we want. This lesson teaches us to think clearly about our specific needs, and then ask God to grant them. Then the blind man told Jesus precisely what he desired: "Lord, that I might receive my sight." That is the kind of a prayer that wins an answer. And an answer it won in this case, for Jesus said: "Receive thy sight; they faith hath saved thee." Then he received his sight, and followed Jesus, glorifying God.

What a wonderful power there is in faith! How is it that the blind beggar's faith saved him? It was because his faith accepted the healing power of Christ. That is the reason faith is so great a thing; it receives the grace, mercy and strength of God. In itself it may be very feeble; but

it lays hold on divine power. That is why Jesus said, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved." That is Paul's meaning when he says, "It is of faith that it might be of grace." The apostle John echoes Christ's teaching when he says: "And this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith." Oh! the mighty power of faith!

Christ, the prophet, died for thy sins and rose again for thy justification; therefore He can and will save thee, if thou wilt trust Him. Christ, the divine Healer, gave the blind man his sight; so He can give thee spiritual vision, if thou wilt have faith in Him.

XIX

ASH WEDNESDAY

THE KEEPING OF LENT

Text: Matt. 6:16-21

In our observance of the Church Year we have now come to Ash Wednesday, or the first day of Lent. Many good people are puzzled as to how Lent ought to be kept. At first thought the lesson for the day may not seem to be very germain in suggesting the best method of observing this solemn season. Indeed, a part of it may seem to be contrary to the spirit of the season. However, by thinking more deeply we find the text a very appropriate Scriptural passage.

What in reality is the meaning of Lent? It is that portion of the Christian year which precedes the anniversary of the sufferings and death of our Saviour, culminating in Good Friday. Therefore the season is a solemn one. It reminds us chiefly of our sins, the punishment they deserve, and the agony Christ had to endure in order to free us from them and their dreadful consequences. Do not these facts already suggest the proper frame of mind needed to celebrate the Lenten season? Do they not also indicate the kind of thoughts that ought to engage our attention? Let us now see whether our text will not help to carry out these suggestions. It indicates—

I. How Not to Keep Lent.

1. *In the vain show of mere formal piety.*

Christ's words are very searching and pertinent: "Moreover, when ye fast, be not as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily I say unto you, they have their reward."

This is good instruction for Lent. Do not make a dis-

play of your piety. If you fast, do not advertise it wherever you go. Do not draw up a long, sanctimonious face for the purpose of impressing others with your intense religious feelings. In short, ostentatious piety is no true piety. It is not of the heart; it is not meant for God alone; it is meant for show, to win the applause of men; to cause them to say, "Behold, how good and holy a man he is."

Christ says of such pompous, parading religionists, "Verily I say unto you, they have their reward." By which he means that they are seeking only the praise of men, and that is all the reward they will ever receive. God will not reward them, for they are not seeking to be good and righteous in His sight. He sees through their hypocrisy, whether their fellowmen do or not. They will be among those to whom Christ will say, at the last day, "Depart from me, ye that work iniquity!"

Thus we see that a mere formal, outward observance, especially for vain parade, is not the right way to keep Lent. There is no repentance in it; no real sorrow for sin and the grief it inflicts on God; no looking to God in the name of the atoning Christ for pardon and grace. Our text designates another wrong way of Lenten observance.

2. *In seeking worldly gain and pleasure.*

After giving His instruction about fasting, our Lord spoke these words of warning: "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust do corrupt and where thieves break through and steal." Of course, this advice is good for all occasions and seasons, but it is especially relevant in the time of Lent. Laying up treasures upon earth is perhaps the most fruitful cause of the undoing of souls. So many people desire earthly treasure, either for its own sake or for the sake of the pleasure it brings. Yes, earthly goods and earthly pleasures are the twin gods of many people. Even in Lent they cannot lay aside their social parties and worldly engagements long enough to think about their sins and the sacrifice Christ made to atone for them.

We should remember that Christ here does not mean to condemn earthly possessions in themselves. He was not fanatical. God permitted Abraham, Isaac and Jacob to become rich, and even restored Job's wealth after he had been sufficiently tested. Christ dined with the rich Pharisee without rebuking him for his accumulations. He also commanded His disciples to "make friends to themselves by means of the unrighteous mammon." He was not that kind of a socialist that condemns all capital and wealth. Just what would become of the world if there were no men who had the ability to accumulate wealth, it is impossible to say. It is doubtful whether any progress would be possible; perhaps the human family itself would not long endure. Very truly did Christ say, "Ye cannot serve God and mammon" (money), but He never said, "Ye cannot make money serve God and His kingdom." The fact is, that is the only true purpose of earthly possessions.

Then what did He mean when He said in our text, "Lay not up for yourselves treasures on earth?" He meant precisely what He said, to the very letter. If we lay up our money or other earthly goods as "treasures"—that is, things that we value more than all else, which is the meaning of "treasures"—then we are setting our affections on them, and they will eventually prove our undoing. That was Christ's meaning when He said, "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." Let us put it in this way: Whenever your earthly and heavenly treasures come into conflict, then the former and not the latter must be given up.

That is why "laying up treasures on earth" is entirely contrary to the spirit of Lent, which is a season when we ought to think of Christ and His sufferings for us, that we might have enduring heavenly treasures. While you are absorbed in money getting, or the pursuit of worldly pleasure, you cannot give thought to spiritual interests—to Christ and His cross.

How true it is, too, that earthly treasures are not enduring! Again and again it occurs that "thieves break through and steal" and that "moth doth corrupt." We

certainly hold our worldly possessions by an uncertain tenure. Have you ever laid away some valuable clothes, thinking you were putting them in a place of real safety, and, behold, when you came to look at them again, they were all moth-eaten? That is what often happens to our earthly treasures. No; earthly possessions should never be turned into earthly "treasures." They should always remain only possessions—held in trust for the advancement of Christ's kingdom.

It is time now to think about the positive side of the observance of this sacred season.

II. How to Keep Lent.

1. *By true inward fasting.*

Our great Teacher said in the text: "But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face; that thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father who is in secret; and thy Father who seeth in secret shall reward thee openly."

This may be taken quite literally. There is no merit in bodily fasting in Lent, because we can do nothing to merit God's saving favor, just as the Bible teaches and the Augsburg Confession confirms. We are saved solely on account of what Jesus Christ has done for us by His active and passive obedience. However, bodily fasting may be a good discipline; it may bring us into closer touch with God and spiritual truth and grace.

Of course, to fast until one grows weak and ill would not be conducive to spiritual growth, for no one could give his thought to spiritual truths if he were suffering from physical discomfort and debility. In this fact lies the fallacy of that extreme asceticism which afflicts and enervates the body, in order that men may be pious. What would God care about such physical flagellations, anyway? How could He feel any pleasure in His people's making themselves miserable for the sake of being so? Would He not find much more delight in their being happy? Surely He would. Christ made no ascetic out of Himself. He says of Himself,

"The Son of man came eating and drinking." He also said, "These things have I said unto you that ye might have joy, and that your joy might be full."

Then what kind of bodily fasting is beneficial to us and pleasing to God? The proper kind of moderation. To eat plain food and drink pure liquids, avoiding excess as to quantity, and also avoiding dainties and condiments that merely flatter the appetite, and thus lead to overloading the digestive organs—such abstemiousness is the best kind of fasting, and helps to make for spirituality, because it preserves the body in the best health. No one can think lucidly and wholesomely on spiritual themes whose body is made sluggish by the coarse habit of gourmandizing. The reason some people become drowsy in the church service as soon as they are quiet for a few minutes is that they have overloaded their stomachs; all the blood is taken from the brain to digest their relay of food and drink. We are convinced that Lent would be much more of a spiritual season for many people if they would do more fasting of the kind we have indicated.

But even this kind of fasting should not be carried on with outward show. Christ said, "When thou fastest, anoint thy head and wash thy face." In His day the custom prevailed of leaving the hair unkempt and the face unwashed when one desired to make a show of great sorrow or piety. Such parading is not pleasing to God, because it is done for the praise of men rather than for the divine approval. So do not wear a long face in Lent. Do not act as if you were going to the funeral of a relative. If you fast, better keep it to yourself, for God will know it, and He will reward you with real spiritual growth and joy.

But there may be another kind of fasting. In the season of Lent it is better not to have too many social engagements. Some of them may not be wrong in themselves, but too many of them will divert attention from the sacred themes of thought suggested by the season. Much fun and hilarity are not consistent with sober thoughts about our sins and Christ's atoning sacrifice for our salvation. People

who keep very late hours on Saturday night in roistering and hilarity will not be in a good spiritual frame of mind to worship in God's house on Sunday morning. There are many things that might not be wrong in themselves, but they become wrong by virtue of the fact that they crowd out of the mind the desire for the higher and more important matters. More social fasting in Lent would keep people in a better spirit for observing it in spirit and in truth.

In still another way Lent may be properly observed:

2. *By cherishing heavenly desires.*

Christ's language is beautiful here, almost poetical: "But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through and steal: for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."

Instead of making earthly things our "treasures," we should make the true and holy things our treasures. We need not be sentimental or tearful in thinking about the present world and all it offers us; but a sensible and honest view will show us they are not enduring. Sometimes both wealth and pleasure take wings and fly away. Then if we have nothing else, we are poor indeed. Our all is lost and gone. Not so if we have cherished the heavenly treasures, for they are eternal.

Now what has Lent to suggest relative to the true treasures? If we reflect on our sins, we will desire to have them forgiven and their defilement and thralldom removed; but we know that this is possible only if we repent of them and accept Christ as our atoning Saviour. On the cross He made "propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but for the sins of the whole world." Thus this holy season leads us to the foot of the cross. By remaining there in spirit and thought we may best observe the Lenten season to the glory of Christ and the advancement of our spiritual life.

XX

THE BEGINNING OF LENT

A SECOND SERMON

THE TRUE LENTEN IDEA

Text: Rom. 5:8

The time of Lent is so important and so suggestive of thought that we add another brief sermon. Our text is Rom. 5:8: "But God commendeth His love toward us in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." This text suggests the real basic idea that ought to dominate our observance of Lent; hence we consider—

I. The Inner Spirit of the Season.

Outward acts, bodily and social abstentions have their value in the observance of the Lenten season. While a particular attitude in worship is not essential, yet a devotional posture surely is helpful to the mind in maintaining the devotional spirit; just so in Lent. If during the Lenten time we surfeit ourselves with social banquets and parties, they will absorb our thoughts, so that we will not have much time or disposition to think of the meaning of the sacred season. Just as men cannot serve God and mammon, so they cannot be thinking on several subjects intently at the same time.

Yet outward observances may also be abused. We may rest in them. We may think Lent consists chiefly in doing without certain harmless pleasures, remaining away from social occasions, and doing without certain kinds or quantities of food. Such an idea would make a merit of outward observance, and that would be utterly contrary to the doctrine of salvation through the merits of Christ alone. More than that, it would be merely formal, and thus would not please God.

The real matter in observing Lent is to read the relevant portions of God's Word, and meditate on the great and blessed facts of Christ's work and sacrifice for us. During

this time we should reflect upon our sins, how heinous and destructive they are, and how offensive to a good and holy God. But we should not stop there. We should also consider that we could not have saved ourselves from our sins, but were helpless under the sentence of divine and eternal justice. Then what was done to deliver us? God sent His Son into the world to redeem us from the curse of the law, to die for us, to take upon Himself in His own person our sins and their terrible penalty, in order that we might be freed from their condemnation, cleansed from their pollution, and delivered from their enslavement. Thus He was our heavenly Substitute, our vicarious Redeemer. We could have been saved in no other way. Love desired to save us, but could not operate unethically; it could not brush justice aside. That would have caused a schism in God Himself and in His moral economy. But thanks be to God, Christ came into the world, assumed our nature, bore our sins on the cross, satisfied for us the righteous demands of justice, and so divine mercy has been able to reach down freely and ethically and save us from our sins.

These are the subjects that should engage our thought during Lent: our sins, how great they are; God's love, how kind it is; Christ's sacrifice, how gracious it was. In all these meditations there will be an element of sadness. When we think of what our sins cost our God and Saviour, we will surely mourn for ourselves and for Him. We cannot help thinking of the awful sorrow our sins laid upon our Redeemer; how He agonized in the garden and on the cross. His bloody sweat and expiring anguish ought to wring tears from our eyes. On the cross He even had to be forsaken of the Father, in order to take our place and prevent our being left without the mercy and consolation of God's presence. Yes, we must mourn for our sins because of the anguish they imposed upon our Redeemer.

But our thoughts need not be wholly sad. There are rifts in the cloud, many of them, through which the sun shines radiantly. And so we turn to—

II. The Sacred Joy of the Season.

Lent has its bright aspect. We may look through the gloom of sin and the pathos of our Lord's sufferings in Gethesemane and on Calvary, and see the victory He won by His death, resurrection and ascension. Our state is not like that of the disciples when they stood awe-stricken and benumbed, near the cross, and saw all their hopes perish in the death of their Master. They could not foresee the victory of Easter morning; they could not even interpret the profound meaning of their Lord's sacrifice on the cross.

Not so with us, who are living after the wonderful plan of redeeming love has been completed. We can look back to a finished atonement, to a completed transaction. And in this retrospect we see Good Friday through the light that blazes from the resurrection and ascension of our divine Lord. What an advantage we have!

In the joy and blessing that come to us through the atonement, the resurrection and the gift of the Holy Spirit we even find it difficult to feel as sad as we ought during the Lenten season. It is as if we had passed through a season of great sorrow; but now the affliction is over, and we see that it has effected for us a greater joy than would have otherwise been possible; we can hardly put ourselves back into the sad state of mind we were before. So we find it almost impossible to enter into the gloom of Good Friday, on account of the radiant light that shines from atoning and victorious grace.

So Paul must have felt, for he wrote (Rom. 5:20): "Where sin abounded grace did much more abound." He meant to make no apology for sin, but to teach that God is able to bring good out of evil, and to make the wrath of man to praise Him. How God can do this we may not know. It belongs to His omniscience and omnipotence. But we may offer a few reflections.

If grace did not abound more greatly than sin, grace could not overcome sin, could not expiate sin. The lesser cannot overcome the greater; the weaker cannot conquer the stronger. The strong man armed outside of the human heart must be stronger than he that keeps it, or else the former could not dispossess and eject the latter.

Moreover, the sacrifice that Christ made on the cross was an infinite sacrifice, because our Lord was divine as well as human; His divinity gave infinite value and suffering to His atoning sacrifice. The propitiation was therefore greater than the sins of mankind, for you never can add enough finities to reach infinity. We do not believe in the doctrine of a "limited atonement." The gift of life in Christ far transcends the loss incurred by Adam's sin. Thus, "where sin abounded grace did much more abound."

Had man never sinned, he would never know the joy of redeeming grace and love. Even if the Son of God had become incarnate to perfect and develop the human family, He never would have become the Redeemer, had not sin come into the world. Thus we never could have realized the sacrificial love of the Father and the Son, had no ethical calamity overtaken the race. In heaven we never could have sung of the Lamb "who hath redeemed us and washed us in His own precious blood." We never would have known the sweet story of the cross. Such a song as, "In the cross of Christ I glory," never could have been written or sung. "Where sin abounded grace did much more abound."

In the heavenly life our joy will be all the more accentuated on account of the contrast between the state of redemption and the state of sin. The darkness makes the light all the brighter and all the more welcome. Health is all the more appreciated after a season of sickness and suffering. "Our light affliction, which is but for the moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." "Where sin abounded grace did much more abound."

Therefore, to sum up, let us first feel the sadness of the Lenten season as expressed in this part of our text, "in that while we were yet sinners," and let us heartily repent of our sins which put our Saviour to such a painful and shameful death; then let us feel the joy of the season, expressed in the other parts of the text: "But God commendeth His love toward us" and "Christ died for us;" and let us rely solely on God's love and Christ's sacrifice for our salvation.

XXI

THE FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT

CHRIST THE VICTOR

Text: Matt. 4:1-11

The gospel for the first Sunday in Lent tells the graphic story of our Lord's conflict with Satan in the wilderness, on the pinnacle of the temple and on the summit of a high mountain. The places in which the threefold temptation occurred are themselves significant. According to the account the Holy Spirit chose the first place, and Satan the second and third places. For the purpose of this ordeal the localities were most strategic. Let us now try to discover what was the significance of this experience of our Lord in the divine plan of redemption.

I. Christ was Capable of Temptation.

The account says that He was led up into the wilderness "to be tempted of the devil." The Greek word for tempted is *peirasthenai,* from *peirazo* (this is as near the spelling as we can represent it with the English letters), which means a real temptation or test, not merely the semblance of one. The same word is used in Heb. 2:18, and almost the same root in Heb. 4:15.

This proves that, while Christ was free from sin, pure and undefiled, the Lamb without blemish, yet He was not impeccable—that is, immune from temptation. He was like our first parents in their state of integrity—without sin, but subject to temptation; that is, His will was set at equilibrium, so that He could choose between good and evil; yet His nature was pure, as theirs was. Pure snow is perfectly white in its nature, yet it may be soiled from without.

How near to our experiences does this bring our divine-human Saviour! If He could not have been tempted, we could not feel that He has a real sympathy with us in our

temptations, a sympathy that grows out of His own real experience. Just such a sympathizing Friend we need in our Redeemer—one who can enter into a real fellow-feeling with us in our every trial and sorrow and disappointment. Perhaps Christ for Himself could have thus sympathized with us even if He had not become incarnate, because of His omnipotence; but it would not be so real to us. "For in that He Himself hath suffered, being tempted, he is able to succor them that are tempted." No; "we have not an High Priest who cannot be touched with the feeling (Greek, *sumpathesai,* sympathize) of our infirmities, but one who has been tempted in all things according to our likeness, apart from sin."

It is a deep question—this one whether Christ could be tempted to do wrong; whether He could have yielded to the solicitation of Satan or not. Those who deny that He was peccable must admit that then this threefold temptation was useless; was, in fact, merely a spectacular play, destroying Christ's true humanity, which is the old error of Docetism; for, if Christ was incapable of sinning, then His human nature was not true human nature, because the human nature of our first parents, while it was pure and holy by creation, was not impeccable, else they never would have fallen into sin.

We know that the question will rise in the mind, What would have been the result if Christ had yielded to the temptation? Perhaps it is not idle nor irreverent to ask that question. We cannot imagine the dire consequences; perhaps we dare not try. Doubtless it would have frustrated the whole plan of redemption, and, for all we know, it might have destroyed God's universe and God Himself. But do you know we really need not speculate or worry over the problem? For Christ did *not* yield to the temptation, but won a complete victory for Himself, and therefore for us, over His Satanic enemy. No doubt God foresaw from eternity what would be the result of His plan of redemption through His only begotten and incarnated Son, and so He made the adventure to carry it into effect.

II. Why Christ was Tempted.

But why was Christ led up into the wilderness *by the Spirit* to be tempted? Apparently this was part of the divine plan. Why? Because Christ was really and truly to take sinful man's place, to be His real Substitute. But man is tempted. Must not his Substitute also be tempted, if He is really to take his place, and endure temptation and overcome it in his stead? That would be a strange kind of substitution which would shield the Substitute from temptation.

More than that, Christ was a new order of moral agent. In some respects He was unique, unlike either angels or men. And every moral agent must be tested, or there would be no true moral agency, no actual freedom of the will. How thankful we should be that the Second Adam did not fail us as did the first Adam, but resisted every assault of the evil one, and thus became the victorious "Captain of our salvation!"

"Led up of the Spirit to be tempted." How well that agrees with the sentence in the Lord's Prayer: "Lead us not into temptation!" Christ here was giving us a petition which grew out of His own experience. He had been led into temptation, and now nothing could be more appropriate than for Him to teach His people to pray that they might not be subjected to a like trial.

After all, it was not the Spirit who *tempted* Christ. No; God never tempts any one to do evil, just as James tells us (Jas. 1:3, 4). He simply brings about the conditions at times that are necessary to test moral agency, and give moral agents an opportunity to incorporate righteousness into their wills, so that it may become their real personal possession and not merely a conferred quality. This is the very constitution of moral agency and also of righteousness; a conferred moral quality must be freely chosen by an act of the will, in order that it may become the free agent's actual personal possession. Thus God did not act arbitrarily in ordaining any of His tests in the history of the moral

universe, but according to the very nature of moral reality.

It will be of practical value to us to analyze—

III. The Inner Character of the Threefold Temptation.

1. Satan's first temptation came after Jesus had fasted forty days and forty nights in the wilderness and had grown weak with hunger. Here the evil one deftly fitted his temptation to the situation. Pointing to some stones, which no doubt closely resembled small loaves of bread, he said to Christ, "If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread." Notice that fatal "If." Had Christ yielded to Satan's proposition, He would have admitted the doubt suggested by that "if" into His own mind, and that would have been a sin. If He was to fulfill His mission as God's incarnate Son, He must never doubt His relation to the Father, nor the nature of His great vocation. Afterward He said, "I do always the will of my Father." To be free from sin, He had to be free from doubt. Besides, Christ must perform no miracles merely for His own sake; and He never did. Think of all the wonders He performed; they were all for others, all for the good of the people He came to bless and save. If He bore sin and suffering and wrought marvels, all must be vicarious. He Himself declared: "The Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many."

The verse Christ quoted, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God," is from Deuteronomy; therefore He gave His approval to that book as a part of the divinely inspired canon of the Old Testament. His citation was extremely apt. When it is wrong to eat bread, men should live on the Word of God—that is, they must care for their souls, even though the body—"the outward man"—may perish. Christ Himself said, "Fear not them who destroy the body, but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both body and soul in hell." How many people today are willing to endanger their souls for the sake of bread and other earthly things! They say, "We must live." But no! it is not essential that men should

live, especially by doing wrong. The essential thing is to preserve the life of the soul in its integrity. There is such a thing, as Christ taught, as saving the lower kind of life by losing the higher (Matt. 10:39; 16:35).

This first temptation stands for all those ordeals in human life when we are tempted to do wrong to secure some physical good or advantage. It corresponds to that part of the original temptation in the garden of Eden when our first parents "saw that the tree was good for food." Satan was simply using one of his old wiles. In such matters let us follow the Second Adam, not the first.

2. In the second temptation Satan took Christ to the pinnacle of the temple, and said to Him, "If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down," etc.

Here was another Satanic "If." Satan is an adept at using "ifs." It is part of his business to create doubt. Just as he tried to lead our Lord away from perfect faith in the Father, so He tries to win us away from God by infusing doubt into our minds. That was part of his stratagem in Paradise—to stir doubt in the woman's mind (Gen. 3:1-5).

Why did Satan tempt Christ in this way? He wanted to lead Him to presume upon His Father's goodness and care. What a useless and unbecoming spectacle it would have been for Christ, the Son of God and the Redeemer of the world, to perform the gymnastic feat of hurling Himself down from the high pinnacle of the temple, simply to prove whether His Father would take care of Him or not! That would indeed have been "tempting God." So Jesus answered His tempter in the best possible way: "It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God."

How do people today tempt God? By going into needless danger, expecting Him to take care of them. The young man who tampers with strong drink is tempting God. Any one who goes into a place of unnecessary moral peril, thinking God will keep him safely, is tempting God. Here Christ is a good example to us.

We learn, too, from this temptation that Satan can make use of the Scriptures. In this case he quoted with verbal

accuracy, but he misapplied the Word. When God in the passage quoted by Satan (Ps. 91:11, 12) promised to give His angels charge over His people, He did not guarantee their safety if they ran into foolish and needless danger. Let us watch Satan when he quotes the Bible, and let us be careful ourselves not to misapply its teaching, lest we fall into one of his many snares.

3. Satan's last attempt to foil God's redeeming plan was to take Christ to the summit of a high mountain, and show Him all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them; and he said to Him, "All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me." This was Satan's bold stroke. And it was clever enough in its way. There is a sense in which the kingdoms of this world are largely under his control. There would not be war today among the most highly civilized nations, if this were not true. None could have been more keenly aware of that fact than was Jesus Himself. To have followed Satan's suggestion would have been a "short cut" to power and dominion. God had promised to His Son all the kingdoms of the earth. Why should He not simply step in and take possession of what was rightfully His own?

But no! Christ would not "do evil that good might come." He was neither a Jesuit nor an opportunist. With Him the means must be as holy as the end to be attained. To bow down and worship Satan, the prince of this world, would have been paying too high a price for the possession of worldly power, whether for a long or a short time. No; Christ chose rather the way of toil, humility, teaching, and vicarious sacrifice on the cross to win the kingdoms of the world to Himself. Sin must first be done away; righteousness must first be established. "Thy kingdom come; thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." Christ knew that His Father's will was a holy will, and therefore the kingdoms of the earth could not be won to Him *in* their sins, but only by being cleansed *from* their sins.

This last temptation is a very fundamental one—one to which many persons are liable; the temptation to gratify

ambition for dominion and power by doing wrong, by yielding to Satan's crooked devices.

Christ really bruised Satan's head by defeating him in this threefold assault. If we put our trust in the victorious Christ, who is the Captain of our salvation, Satan can have no power over us. We can also use the same true and tried weapon that Jesus used to conquer Satan—the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. Satan knows better than to come into contact with that keen, double-edged Jerusalem blade.

"Yield not to temptation,
For yielding is sin;
Each victory will help you
Some other to win."

XXII

THE SECOND SUNDAY IN LENT

THE MARKS OF TRUE FAITH

Text: Matt. 15:21-28

Why did Jesus, as our text tells us, go outside of the Jewish country, and depart for a time "into the coasts of Tyre and Sidon?" These great cities were situated on the Mediterranean Sea in the land of Phenicia, which lay just west of Galilee. Hence they were Gentile cities. Jesus had two reasons, no doubt, for His visit to that country. One of them was a prudential reason; He wished to avoid an open conflict with the Pharisees and other Jewish rulers, who might have seized Him and put Him to death before His teaching of the way of salvation was complete. Thus it is right to avoid danger when we can do so without compromise or cowardice.

However, the chief purpose of this visit was to show at this time that Christ's mission was not to be provincial, not to be confined to the Jews, but, in God's own time, was to be extended to the Gentiles and all the world. Here we have a foreshadowing of Christ's great commission, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to the whole creation." In carrying out that world-wide commanding order, the apostles could appeal to this incident in the life of their Lord, when He gave help to a non-Jewish woman. It is a beautiful lesson of faith, and also gives us a deep insight into some of God's dealings with people.

I. The Woman's Faith.

She was not a Jew, but a Canaanitish or Syro-Phenician woman—a fact that evinces her strong faith; for Christ was a Jew, and she must have known that many of the Jews were very exclusive, and thought that God's blessings were confined to them. But in some way her faith passed through that barrier. She must have had some previous knowledge

of Christ's goodness and power, and therefore she believed that He would be willing to help even a poor Gentile woman, however unworthy she might be.

So we learn that our feeling of unworthiness ought not to keep us from Christ. Indeed, the more unworthy we feel, the more reason to come to Him; because then we need Him most. If we feel worthy in ourselves, we are most unfitted to come to Him, for then our hearts will be filled with pride and self-righteousness, and that will prevent our trusting His grace alone for our salvation. Some people want to wait until they make themselves worthy before they come to Christ. That is wrong. If you wait until you are worthy, you will never come at all.

Let us go further into our text to learn the lesson of faith from this afflicted woman. She came to Christ, and cried out, "Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou Son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a demon." The very wording of her prayer proves her faith. She called Christ "Lord," thereby recognizing His divine power. What the self-righteous Pharisees could not recognize in Christ, this poor Gentile woman, on account of her humble faith, was able to see in His character and person. What insight real faith has! "Now faith is the substance of things hoped, the evidence of things not seen" (Heb. 11:1).

In the next place, we note that "He answered her not a word." That was strange conduct on the part of Christ. Just think of it for a moment: He who declared that He "came to seek and to save that which was lost," and that He "came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many," now refuses to answer the woman's request. He actually closes His lips, almost as if in sullen silence. Why He did this we shall see later. Just now we are interested in analyzing this woman's wonderful faith. Christ's silence did not daunt her. She kept on with her earnest appeal. It requires real faith to keep on praying and serving when God seems to be unresponsive.

But this woman met with another obstacle. When

Christ's disciples saw that she persisted in following them and crying aloud, they no doubt lost their patience, and felt ashamed of the attention she was attracting. Some of the people standing around perhaps began to deride Jesus and His followers. She was making the company ridiculous. But the rebuke of the disciples did not discourage her.

Then Christ said another word that seemed harsh, "I am not come but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel;" which she could not help interpreting as meaning that she was not included in the range of His help; she was only a Gentile. Nevertheless, the narrative says that, even after this apparent rebuff, she "came and worshipped Him, saying, Lord, help me." Her faith would not be denied.

And now Christ says to her the sternest word of all. How strange it sounds in our ears! He says: "It is not meet to take the children's bread, and cast it to the dogs." In order to understand this severe saying, we must remember the Jews were in the habit of calling the Gentiles "dogs," and so the woman understood Christ's metaphor. Perhaps in that day and in the circumstances the words did not sound quite so humiliating to her ears as it does to us in our day. Yet it was enough to disconcert and dishearten her. But she would not permit herself to be turned aside even by a remark that seemed to be insulting. Before this she pleaded; now she argues. And her wit is sharpened by her need and her desperate faith. So she said: "Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their master's table." What humility and what faith! As much as to say, "Yes, Lord, but even if I am only worthy to be compared to a dog, yet I ought to have a few crumbs. I ought to have at least a dog's share. Give me only the crumbs."

The woman had given the finishing stroke to her argument. Her faith would not be denied. She had proved both her humility and her faith. No wonder Jesus was won by her (as, of course, He meant to be all the while), and said to her: "O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee as thou wilt." Then the record says: "And her daughter was made whole from that very hour." Faith had won. After-

ward an apostle said, "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith." Another inspired writer (Heb. 11) calls the long roll of the heroes of faith, saying in every case "By faith" each achieved his great success.

Some people would have been gravely insulted had Christ said to them, "It is not meet to take the children's bread, and cast it to the dogs." They would have walked away indignantly and would have refused to speak to Christ again. Suppose this woman would have been so sensitive and proud. Her daughter would not have been healed. She would have missed her great blessing.

Today many people go unblessed because of their pride; because they take umbrage at the least thing that seems to reflect on their "honor." God cannot give great blessings to people who think more of their poor little dignity and tender feelings than of moral and spiritual good.

Instructive as it is to consider the woman's faith, it will be just helpful for us to reflect now upon—

II. Christ's Testing of the Woman's Faith.

When she followed Christ, and cried after Him, He did not answer her for a while, and when she persisted He seemingly put her off. Why did Jesus treat her in this way? He even seemed somewhat cold and harsh. But He had His reasons. He wanted to teach the woman a lesson, and by so doing teach all the rest of us a lesson. He desired to strengthen and discipline her faith. A faith that will not endure a test is not worthy of the name. What is the use of faith if we must always see every foot of the way? There are some people who lose their faith whenever they cannot understand God's dealings; lose faith in the Bible when they cannot clear up every difficulty with a logical process; in Christianity itself when it does not always work like magic. All this proves that their faith is a very weak affair; therefore they ought to go to school to the Canaanitish woman, and learn the *a b c* of true faith.

In this incident we learn something of God's ways. Jesus did not at once grant the woman's request, but we

can easily see between the lines that all the while He was ready and anxious to help her; for when her faith had overcome every objection, He exclaimed: "O woman, great is thy faith; be it done unto thee even as thou wilt." No doubt God brought about this incident, not only for the woman's sake, but also for the sake of all who would ever read the story, so that they would not think Him indifferent when He does not answer prayer at once, but that He simply withholds His answer for some wise purpose of His own. It is good for us to desire His blessings intensely enough to ask for them more than once. The same lesson is taught by Christ is His parable about the inportunate woman and the unjust judge. Sometimes it is better for us to have the discipline of waiting, patience and faith than to have our petitions granted at once. God may "move in a mysterious way His wonders to perform;" but we may rely upon Him; He always moves wisely and well.

Let us not misintrepret God's silences. Sometimes they are the best answers to our prayers, as well as the necessary discipline of our faith. An old English couplet, not very poetical but suggestive, runs as follows:

> "Why win we not at once what we in prayer require?
> That we may learn great things as greatly to desire."

XXIII

THE THIRD SUNDAY IN LENT

THE MASTER OF THE SPIRITUAL REALM

Text: Luke 11:14-28

In previous lessons we have seen that Jesus was complete master of the natural realm. This was exemplified in the miracles of water turned into wine, of the multiplied loaves and fishes, and of the stilling of the storm on the Galilean Sea. But there is another sphere which is still more difficult to master—that of the spiritual realm. Did Jesus likewise prove Himself a victor here? Our lessons for last Sunday and today prove that He did. He cast the demons out of the daughter of the Syro-Phenecian woman in last Sunday's lesson and out of the dumb man in today's.

We can pause here just a moment to explain what were these demoniacal possessions of which we read so often in the gospels. Some of the liberal theologians and critics try to explain away their supernatural character by saying that they were merely violent or distressing forms of physical disease, which the Jews and other people of those crude times attributed to evil spirits. But that is treating Christ and the gospels rationalistically. They distinguish clearly between sickness and such possessions by devils. Christ never pretended to cast a devil out of a leper or a paralytic or a blind or deaf man. But He spoke directly to the demons as if they were personalities; and if they were not, He was either deceived or a deceiver. In either case He could not have been the world's Redeemer. But the work of Jesus, the Christ, is always capable of a reasonable explanation, if we are willing to look for one, and even if the rationalists cannot find it.

This is the true exposition: When the eternal Son of God assumed human nature, and thereby came out into the visible realm, God also permitted the evil spirits to become,

in a manner, incarnated, and thus come out also into the visible realm, so that men could see the contest between Him and them. How else could He have proved His complete power over them? Then when He moved back into the invisible sphere, they did the same. So, while there are demoniacs today, just as really as there were then, they do not appear now in so palpable a form, just as the Redeemer Himself does not appear now in an outward, visible way. The contest now is waging in the spiritual domain. This age is the dispensation of the Spirit.

As briefly as possible we must now unfold the great lessons of the text, which we shall consider under two heads: I. Christ the master of demons; II. Demons the masters of men.

I. Christ the Master of Demons.

Just as easily as He multiplied the loaves, stilled the waves, cured diseases, and raised the dead, so He cast out evil spirits. He commanded, and they obeyed. The demon mentioned in our text made the man dumb; but when Christ cast him out, "the dumb spake." The devils recognized Jesus. Once one of them said to Him: "We know thee who thou art: the Holy One of God." Another time some of them said, "Art thou come to torment us before the time?" How did they know Him? If we believe in the pre-existence of the Son of God and also of the evil spirit, who are fallen angels, the mutual recognition is readily explained.

How did Jesus cast out demons? The wicked Pharisees said He cast them out by the power of Beelzebub, the chief of the devils. But Jesus showed them how absurd it would be for Satan to turn against himself. In that way he would destroy his own kingdom. "A house divided against itself cannot stand," was Christ's apt epigram. How easy it is to refute the arguments of wicked people! True reasoning or logic is not on their side. They are always falling into fallacies. That is why rationalists are often so irrational; their unregenerate reasoning leads them into all kinds of sophistries.

Then Jesus pointed out the secret of His power in dealing with evil spirits: "But if I with the finger of God cast out devils, you may be sure the kingdom of God is come upon you." It is by "the finger of God" that He cast out demons. Powerful as they were, it required only God's finger to put them to rout. So we may know what is the true source of our strength in the contest with the powers of darkness.

Our Lord then speaks a most relevant parable: "When a strong man armed keepeth his palace, his goods are in peace: But when a stronger than he shall come upon him, and overcome him, he taketh from him all his armor wherein he trusted, and divideth his spoils." The point of this parable is this: The first strong man armed is Satan entrenched in a human heart. He rules there in security for awhile, able to keep away all his enemies. But Christ is the one who is "stronger than he." When Christ, the Son of God, comes to a soul desirous of being delivered from sin's bondage, He overcomes Satan, binds him, casts him out, and takes up His abode there Himself. There, my brother, you know the secret of liberation from Satan's toils—it is Christ, the one who is "stronger than he!" If you would be the victor, you must call on "the Captain of your salvation." "Thanks be to God who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!"

And now we must turn to the second part of our lesson which is sad with the tragedy of spiritual defeat.

II. Demons the Master of Men.

We have here one of the most searching of Christ's parables. It tells the sad story of a soul once delivered from Satan's thralldom, and then repossessed. "When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places, seeking rest." What an insight into the disposition of evil spirits that vivid touch evinces! An evil spirit can never be contented unless he is doing harm. So outside of a human heart is "dry places" for him. He wanders about seeking rest, but finding none. Somewhere the Bible speaks

of people who "weary themselves to do evil." How malignant are the demons!

It would seem that evil spirits sometimes form resolutions. After roaming about restlessly for awhile, this one said, "I will return to my house whence I came out." You may depend upon it, when an evil spirit has been ejected from a human heart, he will come back sooner or later, and try to regain possession. So the converted and confirmed must ever be on their guard against his wiles.

And now he comes back to his former habitat, and what does he find? He finds it all "swept and garnished," and Matthew says "empty." Ah! that is the fatal trouble—"empty." It is not occupied by Christ and His Word. Were it inhabited by Him, the One who is stronger than Satan, the evil spirit could never gain entrance.

Here we note the worthlessness of mere self-reformation; it may for a time eject the unclean spirit, and get the house fairly well "swept and garnished;" but, alas! it is "empty." No Christ is there; no one who is able to cope with Satan, the strong man armed. He likes it all the better that the place is "swept and garnished," for that gives him a chance to befoul it again, blotch the walls and hack to pieces the beautiful furnishings and pictures. But that is not the extent of his fell purpose; he finds seven other spirits, more debased than himself, and they take possession of the dwelling, and hold high carnival there. No wonder Christ adds, "And the last state of that man is worse than the first."

Let a man once try to reform himself, and fail, and he will always make matters worse for himself. Unaided human nature is no match for the powers and principalities of evil. Every time it will go down in defeat. Demons are stronger than men.

This, then, is the great lesson to be derived from our

gospel for the day: We must let Christ eject Satan from our hearts, occupy them Himself, and keep Satan out.

"Soldiers of Christ, arise,
And gird your armor on,
Strong in the strength which God supplies
Through His eternal Son.

"Strong is the Lord of hosts,
And in His mighty power,
The man who in the Saviour trusts
Is more than conqueror."

XXIV

THE FOURTH SUNDAY IN LENT

CHRIST AND THE HUNGRY MULTITUDE

Text: John 6:1-15

A most graphic narrative is the gospel for the fourth Sunday in Lent—the story of the multiplied loaves and the feeding of the five thousand. The incident, told with so much literary beauty and simplicity, teems with suggestive lessons.

As we shall see, this incident has an integral place in the divine plan of redeeming grace, and also conveys some useful suggestions as to the observance of Lent. A number of characters figure in the incident, and we gather our thoughts about them.

I. CHRIST THE CHIEF CHARACTER.

In the center of the picture moved Christ Himself. Let us go to school to Him, the great Teacher both by word and act.

1. *His interest in the bread question.*

Christ cares for bread; He has an interest in the bread and butter problem. Some of the critics would say that He did not come to tell us anything about such material things, just as they say the Bible was not intended to teach science and history; He simply came to reveal and furnish the way of redemption; but the Bible does not present such a one-sided Christ. His feeding of the hungry multitude with the loaves and fishes, performing a miracle to do so, agrees with His introduction of the sentence, "Give us this day our daily bread," into the very midst of the model prayer which He gave the world. The kingdom of God has its vital relation to bread. Christ was practical; He knew that His disciples, while here on earth, would need temporal blessings; hence

he included such needs in His scheme of beneficence and grace. Christ's teaching and example, though they point mainly to eternal things, had no flavor of false spiritualism, which would despise earthly goods and bodily comforts and necessities.

2. *His lordship over nature.*

This incident proves Christ's complete mastery over the natural realm. Just as the "conscious water saw its Lord and blushed" at the wedding; just as all manner of physical diseases left human bodies at His word; just as the wind and waves obeyed His will; so here He makes bread by an accelerated process with perfect ease, just as if He knew all about the resources of nature. Where did He get the extra material for increasing the loaves and fishes? If He was God, it is all explained, for God is making loaves and fishes by natural processes all the time, and also gives man the power and skill to prepare them in such a way as to make them palatable and wholesome. Christ was no less master in the physical realm than in the spiritual.

3. *His orderly method.*

Why did the writer of the gospel include that little realistic touch, "Make the people sit down;" then add that there was much grass in the place? To show that this was a real event, not fable, not myth; that it occurred at a definite place and under natural circumstancecs. There is no fanciful or fantastic decoration here, as there would have been had the incident been a piece of fiction. The people were bidden to sit down on the grass in companies or divisions, so that they could be fed more easily, and so none could move from one place to another, and thus claim more than their share. All of it has an air of verisimilitude, of naturalness and reality that compel belief in its historical character. It was a great miracle, but there is about it no evidence that anything that could be done by natural means was done miraculously. Even the disciples were employed to distribute the food to the people.

4. *His example of frugality.*

And what a strange command it was to gather up the fragments, that nothing be lost! Why, one who could perform such a miracle surely would not need to economize in respect to the fragments. Yet here He thought it worth while to teach the lesson of frugality. Here is no fanatical teacher who has become so "spiritual" that He disregards the common but necessary virtues. Does not the present wasteful age need this lesson? The fact is, economy is a spiritual virtue; while the person who is wasteful of food and other temporal necessities simply lacks that much of being truly spiritual. More than that, the fact that nothing was to be wasted indicates that Christ did not intend to continue to perform such miracles merely on request, making it unnecessary for people to be frugal and foresighted; and thus, through the natural bread, He sought to lead the minds of the people to the true spiritual bread for the soul, the bread that perisheth not.

5. *His unworldly spirit.*

When the multitude saw the wonderful miracle that Jesus did, they were convinced that He was "the Prophet that should come into the world," and so they wanted to take Him by force and make Him king. However, He knew that such a procedure would not be according to the divine plan of saving the world; therefore He escaped from them, and went up into a mountain to be alone. Had Christ come to establish an earthly kingdom, He might have yielded to the people's desires more than once. But He had not come into the world to win the honors of worldly ambition. As He said to Pilate, "My kingdom is not of this world," so now, long before, He carried out the same principle. This fact proves that those liberal critics are wrong who teach that Jesus was disappointed in His early ambitions, and gave up the idea of establishing an earthly kingdom only when He saw that the Jews rejected Him.

No; Jesus knew all the time what the divine purpose was. While He came to establish a kingdom, it was a spiritual kingdom pure and simple. In order to establish

such a kingdom, He knew He had to go by the way of the cross. The first thing to do was to atone for sin, and thus make it possible for God righteously to forgive sin, save the sinner, and confer upon him a new and holy life-principle. What would have been the profit of establishing a kingdom of earthly glory while sin remained? Such a kingdom would soon have perished, just as so many great nations have been destroyed by their own wickedness. A kingdom of righteousness must be based on righteous principles. So Christ again and again refused to be made an earthly king, but chose the humble way of spiritual teaching and the bitter way of the atoning cross.

We may learn an important lesson from Him. No success is worth achieving which is not according to the principles of true righteousness. It will soon pass away, and leave its possessor poor and desolate indeed.

Thus we have considered Christ as the chief character in this thrilling event. But He was not the only actor. In all His good works He always associated others with Him. We have already learned that Christ does those things that other agents cannot do, such as multiplying the loaves and fishes; but He does not do those works that men themselves can do.

II. Other Characters.

1. Philip. To him Christ said, "Whence shall we buy bread, that these may eat?" But Christ said this "to prove him, for He Himself knew what He would do." Note the sublime consciousness that Jesus had of His divine power. But Philip had no suggestion to make. He saw the difficulty, but could find no way out of it. How like human nature! How much easier it is to suggest problems than to solve them! The Bible always portrays our weak human nature as it is. Never does it flatter it.

2. Andrew. This disciple came with a partial suggestion, but, so far as he could see, it was of no avail. He said, "There is a lad here who hath five barley loaves and two small fishes; but what are they among so many?" There

we have the same story. How easily our poor human wisdom reaches the end of its tether! However, note that Christ turned the suggestion, insufficient though it seemed, into good use. No doubt He knew well enough that the lad was present with his small supply, but it was good for Andrew also to have his eyes open and add his feeble mite to help out of the emergency. It is better for people to think and plan, even if they are not very effective, than for them to be utterly listless. But note how Christ saw that the five barley loaves and two small fishes were the key to the situation. How true it is that God often chooses the weak things to confound the mighty!

3. The lad. It would seem that the only provident person in the great throng was a lad, who had brought with him five barley loaves and two small fishes, which he no doubt expected to sell. The boy had some foresight; "an eye to business," as we would say. Whatever may have been his motive, he little thought of the important part he would have in one of the most signal events of history. But Christ made use of his humble contribution. With it He fed the great multitude. So a little lad can often help along a good and great cause. He can be like the lad who exclaimed, "I can push a pound;" but it was the last pound needed to move the heavy object to its place. This is a good lesson for children, who never ought to think that they amount to nothing. A little child has often led grown people to Christ. Do you not think this lad of the miracle was glad when he saw what Christ had done with his few loaves and fishes? Perhaps he often spoke it afterward. Would it not be interesting to know what became of the little contributor?

4. The disciples. Christ's method of making use of others is very attractive. He multiplied the food, making use of the nucleus on hand, rather than creating from nothing, for He alone could perform such a marvel; but He did not distribute the provision to the multitude directly. He handed it to the disciples, and they carried it to the people, who were seated about in companies on the grass.

How suggestive is His conduct! How much better it

was to give His disciples a part in the work than to do everything Himself! He might have extended His miracle by feeding the multitude directly, but that was not His way nor the best way. It was good for the disciples to have a share in the work.

This is part of God's plan for the extension of His kingdom—to make use of men as agents. While He may not positively need our services, yet He knows that we need the discipline of work. He makes us His witnesses, embassadors and workmen. We are His junior partners. "So then we are workers together with God." Thus God honors and disciplines us by putting responsibility into our hands. He has given each of us some useful talent, and He says to us, "Occupy till I come." May all of us be workmen who "need not be ashamed, rightly dividing the Word of Truth."

"Ye servants of the Lord,
Each in his office wait,
Observant of His heavenly Word,
And watchful at His gate."

XXV

THE FIFTH SUNDAY IN LENT

CHRIST THE FUNDAMENTAL REASONER

Text: John 7:46-59

The gospel for the fifth Sunday in Lent gives an example of our Lord's method of reasoning. It is not the logical method, the praxis that makes use of syllogisms. That method is a human device, one by which the finite mind, through premises and conclusions and their relations, laboriously reaches its rationalized results. If Jesus had used that method, He would have proved by that very token that He was limited like the rest of us.

No; Christ used the intuitional method, which might be defined as an appeal to pure truth and experience as they make their inpingement on the spiritual consciousness.

In previous lessons we have followed in our Redeemer's footsteps as He has proved Himself master of the natural and spiritual realms. Is He also master of the realm of thought and reason? In order to be our perfect Redeemer, He must be sovereign in all spheres. Let us study this lesson to learn what a profound and fundamental reasoner He was; more than human—also divine.

I. Respecting His Own Sinlessness.

First, our Lord makes this challenge to His accusers: "Which of you convicteth Me of sin?" They had accused Him of falsehood because He bore witness of Himself; they also sought to kill Him because of the trenchant things He had been saying to them. Note His mode of reasoning. He challenges them to convict Him of a single sin. It was a direct appeal to their consciousness, knowledge, consciences. As if He had said: "I have been living among you, doing my miracles to all classes, and living without moral fault

among you. Are these the marks of one who bears a false message, of one who means to deceive? Can perfect moral purity go with such deception as you attribute to me? If I were actuated by such motives, would not my acts and words betray me somewhere? How can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit?"

But you will at once discern the labored process of reasoning by which we, a mere human speaker, must work out these conclusions. Not so with Jesus. He simply appealed to the intuitions and consciences of His auditors and permitted them spontaneously to draw the proper conclusion.

And we appeal to reason and conscience today along the same line: Is not the sinlessness of Christ irrefutable proof that He was more than human? If He was naturally engendered, as all other men have been, why did He not inherit a carnal nature like all other men, and hence become a sinner? Why was He the only exception among all the sons of Adam in all history? There is no adequate way to account for His life of perfect righteousness, except on the ground that He was "conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary," and therefore was divine as well as human.

In the same fundamental way He reasoned—

II. In Regard to Truth.

"If I say the truth, why do ye not believe Me?" He said. Another direct appeal to conscience, as if He were to say: "Just lay aside all prejudice, and listen to me sincerely, and see whether my truth will not convince you." In verses 31 and 32 of this same chapter Jesus said: "If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." In verse 45 He makes this accusation against the Jews: "And because I tell you the truth, ye believe me not."

Here the rationalist would say that Jesus "begs the question," because the very point at issue between him and His opponents was whether Jesus was the true Messiah or not. And in mere human logic that would be true—it was a *petitio principii.* But in reality the reasoning was sound,

because we know from experience, and millions have known it in all the centuries of Christian history, that, when men listen to Christ and come to Him in simple faith, they do receive the assurance of truth and of pardon and peace; they do discover that He is "the way, and the truth, and the life;" they do find that "the truth makes them free." It is proved, not by logical praxis, but by experience. Therefore Jesus reasoned correctly with the Jews; had they been susceptible to the truth, they would have believed on Him.

His reasoning was also sound—

III. In Regard to God.

Let us note some of Christ's categorical statements respecting the relation of those stubborn Jews to God. In verse 42 He says: "If God were your Father, ye would love me; for I proceeded forth and came from God; neither came I of myself, but He sent me." According to the canons of mere human logic, what a begging of the question it is! But according to the facts of Christian experience, how true and precious is Christ's statement! Verse 47 is of the same character: "He that is of God heareth God's words: ye therefore hear them not, because ye are not of God." Likewise verses 54 and 55: "If I honor myself, my honor is nothing: it is my Father that honoreth me; of whom ye say that He is your God. Yet ye have not known Him; but I know Him: and if I should say I know Him not, I should be a liar like unto you; but I know Him and keep His sayings."

What would a man trained in discursive methods of reasoning think of all these oracular statements? He would say they were a mere "begging of the question." The very premise to be proven is taken for granted.

Yes, such would be true in mere human logic; but that was not our divine Lord's method, which was the method of stating the pure truth from the truth's viewpoint. When men are full of prejudice and anger, as the Jews were at that time, the logical method would be of no avail, but the appeal to intuition might be. This is the method of Christ:

"I am from God and speak His words; this must be true because you cannot convict me of a single moral fault. Then surely, if you were of God, if you had God's Spirit within you, you would gladly receive my testimony." It was the appeal to conscience, not merely to the dialectical faculty. It was just what the Lord had said to Nicodemus: "Except any one be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." Or what Paul afterward declared: "The carnal mind is enmity against God." It would be as if today some skeptic would want to thrash you by an argument, a purely logical process, and you were to say to him: "My brother, a man must be regenerated in order to know and appreciate spiritual truth." That would be the fundamental way to put the matter. As a human reasoner, you might use the logical process upon him, and might do him some good, though the danger is that He might soon ask you a number of questions which you could not answer. However, if you were to go to the root of the matter at once, you would not argue, but would make your appeal to the need of a spiritual experience. Christ, being divine, mostly used the fundamental method, not the indirect and labored process of human reasoning; and thus He proved that He was divine.

IV. In Respect to His Own Person and Power.

Here we note again the Great Teacher's experiential, rather than discursive, mode of reasoning. The Jews accused Him of being a Samaritan and having a devil. He answered, "I have not a devil; but I honor my Father, and ye dishonor me. And I seek not mine own glory: there is one that seeketh and judgeth." The very fact that He sought not to exalt Himself, but submitted wholly to the Father's will, proved that He was no pretender, and therefore could not be actuated by a demon. But it would also prove what He added in verse 51: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, If a man keep my saying, he shall never see death." Do you see the force of His reasoning? If He was from God, and always spoke only the things that God gave Him to say, then the keeping of His words would surely save men from spiritual and eternal death. That was clear reasoning

again, and Christian experience everywhere corroborates it; for you and I, if we are true Christians, know that "whosoever believeth on the Lord Jesus Christ hath eternal life."

But of course the prejudiced Jews did not comprehend His reasoning, because they rejected the only way by which an experience is wrought in the soul. They retorted: "Now we know that thou hast a devil. Abraham is dead, and the prophets; and thou sayest, If a man keep my saying, he shall never taste of death. Art thou greater than our Father Abraham, who is dead? And the prophets are dead. Whom makest thou thyself?" Then He made His statements, already quoted, about His knowing and honoring God and keeping His sayings. If He thus knew God, and was sent by Him into the world to redeem it, then He must have existed eternally with God (John 1:11), and so what He added must be true: "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and He saw it, and was glad." When the Jews angrily protested, "Thou are not yet fifty years old, and hast thou seen Abraham?" it was inevitable for Jesus to reply: "Before Abraham was *I am.*"

Christ's reasoning is most closely packed together, with no drop-stitches to break the connection: He knew God, He was sent of God, He honored God, He always did God's will and said God's words; therefore He must have existed with the Father from eternity; hence He lived in Abraham's day, and Abraham rejoiced in believing on Him. So He could say, "Before Abraham was, I am." That is, "I have always existed." The fundamental reasoning of it is this: The person who has *experienced* salvation through faith in Christ knows that all Christ's statements are true. They were spoken originally for the benefit of the Jews; they were recorded in the gospel, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, for our profit.

Let us make the application: Christ does not want us to know Him and His saving truth by mere logical demonstration; that would make us rationalistic; He wants us to know Him by a higher kind of logic, the logic of *spiritual experience;* so that we can say with no shadow of doubt: "I

know that my Redeemer liveth." May our experience find its echo in the impressive words of the hymn:

"Thou art the Way: to Thee alone
From sin and death we flee;
And he who would the Father seek
Must seek Him, Lord, by Thee.

"Thou art the Truth: Thy Word alone
True wisdom can impart;
Thou only canst inform the mind,
And purify the heart.

"Thou art the Life: the rending tomb
Proclaims Thy conquering arm;
And those who put their trust in Thee,
Nor death nor hell shall harm.

"Thou art the Way, the Truth, the Life;
Grant us that Way to know;
That Truth to keep, that Life to win,
Whose joys eternal flow."

XXVI

PALM SUNDAY

THE BEAUTY OF CHILDREN'S PRAISE AND SERVICE

Text: Matt. 21:1-9

The gospel for today records Christ's triumphal entry into Jerusalem. That is why the day is called Palm Sunday; for the disciples spread palm branches before our Lord, and with them decorated the little animal on which He rode; and, as we know, the palm is a symbol of victory.

On the First Sunday in Advent we had the same lesson, and in our sermon for that day we pointed out the sacred significance of Christ's triumphal entry in the plan of salvation. Since Palm Sunday is confirmation day in many of our churches, we desire to show today how appropriate it is for the children and young people who have been instructed in the doctrine and practice of Biblical religion to come to the altar, and ratify the baptismal covenant which their parents and sponsors made for them when they were infants. We shall see that the Church chose well when she selected Palm Sunday as confirmation day. In verses 15 and 16 of the chapter from which our gospel lesson is taken, we read: "But when the chief priests and the scribes saw the wonderful things that He did, and the children that were crying in the temple, and saying, Hosanna to the Son of David, they were moved with indignation, and said unto Him, Hearest thou what these are saying? And Jesus said unto them, Yea: did ye never read, Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings thou has perfected praise?"

Thus we see that Jesus' triumphal season continued for some time after He had entered Jerusalem. The children were praising Him in the temple. And what did He say of their adoration? He indicated that it was most acceptable to God, and quoted from the eighth Psalm to prove it.

It is a delight to see so many of our young people here today for confirmation. It is right and good that they should be here. Youth is the time to begin to serve God; for the Bible expressly says: "Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth." I felicitate you and your parents that you are taking this step, which is a step upward and forward in the Christian life. The pastor has found rare pleasure in instructing you in the doctrines and practice of the Bible, as they are outlined and set forth in the catechism. Indeed, catechization has been an increasing joy to him as the years have come and gone. He has never wearied of it. He knows the benefit that comes from proper instruction in the principles of our holy religion in youth. Having received the grace of regeneration in child baptism, the child's heart is open to admit the "engrafted Word, which is able to save the soul," through the Holy Spirit's operation. Under proper Biblical instruction the seed principles of the new life implanted in baptism germinate and develop into the rich fruitage of a truly Christian character. There is no undue excitement about it, no emotionalism; but there is true, joyous and abiding spiritual feeling, while at the same time the intellect is instructed, the will re-inforced, and the life directed. Let no one think it is a mere form, and therefore of little value, to indoctrinate the youth of the Church.

Let us note, now, how fitting it is to assume your confirmation vows on Palm Sunday.*

I. Palm Sunday Means that Christ is King.

The multitude that went before and after Christ, cried aloud: "Behold, thy King cometh unto thee." What could be more pertinent and profitable than for you, young friends, to acknowledge Christ as your King. You have learned in your catechism of the three offices of Christ—Prophet, Priest and King. In following the teaching of Christ you confessed Him as your Prophet or Teacher. On Good Friday, as you looked upon Him hanging upon the cross, giving

*Of course, other days, like Whitsunday and Trinity Sunday, are also appropriate.

Himself up as an offering for sin, you avowed Him as your Priest; and now, on Palm Sunday, the day of His triumphal procession, you acclaim Him as your King.

This means that you are willing to let Him rule over you and control your lives. "Ye are not your own; ye are bought with a price." For a young person, or any other person, for that matter, to want to be his own sovereign, and do just as he pleases, would be most unfortunate, because his knowledge is so limited that he would make many serious, and perhaps fatal, mistakes; besides, untamed human nature is so prone to sin that he would be sure to go into ruinous ways. But if you accept Christ as your Ruler, and let Him guide you by His Word and Spirit, you will always be directed in "the highway of holiness," and your life will be a moral and spiritual success. As your King, Christ will rule your bodies, so that they will be fit temples for the Holy Ghost; your intellects, so that you will think correctly and purely; your feelings, so that they will be loving and holy; and your wills, so that they will be empowered always to choose the right way of life.

II. Palm Sunday Gives Praise and Worship to Christ.

How the multitudes on that day shouted their hosannas: "Hosanna to the Son of David. Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!" Afterward in the temple, as has been said, the children cried out, "Hosanna to the Son of David!" That word "Hosanna"—what a beautiful word it is! How euphoniously it works itself into our church hymns, anthems and chants! The Holy Spirit must have directed the multitude and the children to use that word.

It is a good thing for children to learn early in life to worship God. How happy we ought to be that Christ taught us that their praises are acceptable to Him! By beginning in our youth to praise Him your whole life becomes attuned to the service of worship. It becomes "second nature;" it will break forth spontaneously. It is so much better to learn

the hymns and Glorias and Kyries of the Church when you are young than to wait until you grow old, when it is always harder to learn. Think how much people miss by living forty and fifty years without knowing the pure joy of worship!

My young friends, never sit idle in God's house. Own a Book of Worship, and take part in the services, and know the true joy of worshiping God "in the beauty of holiness."

III. Palm Sunday also Means Victory.

That processional on Palm Sunday is called "Christ's triumphal entry into Jerusalem." The palm branches in those days were a symbol of victory.

This thought is also appropriate for our class of confirmants. If they have been truly taught, and have truly accepted the teaching of God's Word, and have in their hearts acknowledged Christ as their King, they have already won a victory through the grace of God; victory over the carnal heart, which is prone to do evil rather than good; victory over Satan, who perhaps more than once tempted them to neglect or disobey the instruction of God's Word; victory over spiritual indifference, which causes many people to be utterly inert in spiritual matters; and victory, too, over sinful pleasure, which tried more than once to lure them from the place of religious instruction. Yes, I can see that this is already a real Palm Sunday for our class of catechumens.

What was the significance of Christ's triumphal march into Jerusalem? It was a prophecy of the time when He shall be King over every realm; or, as we often sing, "When Jesus shall reign where'er the sun doth his successive journeys run." So may this day, your confirmation day, be an earnest forecast of future victories! When temptations come, as they are sure to come to all of us, may you never go down in defeat! May the Palm be your emblem, and victory your motto. Then when Christ shall come in His glory, and shall be clothed with all power and authority, you will have a share in His triumph. Remember the divine

promise: "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life."

Once more let us observe—

IV. Palm Sunday Means Continued Service.

Service is clearly implied in the gospel lesson. Two of the disciples had to go some distance to get the colt and its mother; that meant work and service for the Master. The owner of the animals had to permit them to be used, because, as the disciples told him, "the Lord had need of them." This was also service. When the multitude gathered branches from the trees, and took some of their garments and spread them in the way before Christ, that was also service; it required activity. After the processional reached the city, which was greatly stirred, and inquired excitedly, "Who is this?" the multitude of disciples had to bear their testimony; which they did by saying, "This is the Prophet, Jesus, from Nazareth of Galilee." That, too, was service; it was doing something for Christ.

So your celebration of Palm Sunday today as confirmants of the Church spells service. You are not to be idlers; you are to be busy in the Lord's vineyard. You do not serve to be saved, but you are saved to serve. A sick man cannot do much work, and if he is seriously sick, he can do none, but is rather a burden upon others. So when you are sick with the fatal malady of sin, you cannot work for Christ and His Church; but when you are cured, when you are made well and strong by His saving and regenerating grace, then you are in condition to work, and to work effectively for His cause. If you do not care to work for Him, it will be a sure sign that you have not been cured of your deadly disease of sin.

I fear that some young people—probably some of their elders, too—look upon confirmation as graduation—that is, as graduation from any vital connection with and active service in the Church. Sometimes it actually occurs that, after confirmation, young people are seldom seen in the house of God, and seldom make use of the means of grace.

But such conduct defeats the very purpose of catechetical instruction, and mistakes the primary object of confirmation. In one sense, confirmation day might be called graduation day; not graduation from the activities of the Church, but into full and active communicant membership therein.

So it will be expected of you, not so much by your pastor as by your Lord and Master, to be more active than ever in the Sunday school, to join the Luther League and take part in its important work, and to attend faithfully the services of the Church. It has been for these very purposes that you have been instructed in the doctrines and duties of the Christian life. Let me assure you, there is a place for you in the work of the Church. You may or may not become officers; but you can be soul-winners; you can invite people to come to God's house to hear the gospel message; you can read the Bible and other good books; you can pray for the Church and her pastor; you can be present in your place whenever duty calls.

The officers and pastor bid you welcome into the communicant membership of the Church. The future of Christ's cause depends upon the young people. Learn the fine Christian art of serving well while you are young, so that when greater responsibilities are placed upon your shoulders, you will not fail to discharge your duty effectively. When those of us who are older shall be called from this sphere of action, you will have to carry on the Church and her institutions, and make them a blessing to the world. Can your Master and Lord depend on you? Let me exhort you, as Paul exhorted Timothy: "Fight the good fight of faith; lay hold on eternal life." Remember, too, those other inspiring words of the same apostle: "Let us not be weary in well-doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not. So then, as we have opportunity, let us work that which is good toward all men, and especially toward them that are of the household of faith."

My young friends, may your confirmation day, combined with the Palm Sunday lesson, mean these four great fun-

damental truths for you through all your future—that Christ is your King, and should have the rule over you; that to praise Him in worship is comely and profitable; that through Christ you can win the victory over every temptation; and that you shall remain faithful unto death, and receive the crown of life. First to accept Christ by faith as your Prophet, Priest and King, and then to serve Him with fidelity to the end—that is the sum and substance of the Christian life. Amen.

XXVII

HOLY THURSDAY

THE DOCTRINE OF THE EUCHARIST

Texts: Epistle, 1 Cor. 11:23-32;

Gospel, John 13:1-15

Many of our churches celebrate the Lord's Supper on the evening of Holy Thursday. It is fitting to do so, for very probably this sacrament was instituted on that evening. The gospel lesson is the narrative of the washing of the disciples' feet by their Lord and Master—an example of condescending love and gracious humility. However, the text is not relevant to the subject of our reflections tonight, namely, the Holy Eucharist, especially in view of the fact that we have come together for the purpose of partaking in that ordinance. Therefore we turn to the epistle which contains Paul's graphic account of the institution of the Lord's Supper.

We shall not, however, follow the epistle textually, but shall take the general fact of the Holy Supper as set forth in the Scriptures, and point out some of its main features and doctrines. We shall call our sermon "The Three C's of the Holy Communion."* Our purpose in using the alliterative method is to fix the thoughts more firmly in your memory. Let us note these three capital C's.

I. The Holy Communion is a Confession.

You will remember that Paul says in the epistle: "As oft as ye eat this bread and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord's death till He come." The Revised Version says, "Ye do proclaim." Thus, whenever you and I come to the Lord's

*While the author was pastor of St. Mark's Lutheran Church, Atchison, Kansas, a friend gave him the outline of the three C's used in this sermon. The development of the several parts of the sermon is the author's own; but his friend should have the credit of the suggestive alliterative outline.

table, we preach a sermon; we make a confession. And what do we confess? Two things:

1. *That we are sinners.*

We do not make a "loud profession" in coming to the sacrament of the altar. We do not profess to be good. Many people outside of the Church mistake our motive and spirit; they think that, when we come to the Lord's table, we profess to be very good, and even better than other people. But that is an error. If we come in the right spirit, we come very humbly and contritely, renouncing all self-righteousness, and confessing that we are deep-dyed sinners.

No, we make no "profession" of goodness; we make a humble confession of sinfulness and unworthiness. It is rather the people who remain away form the Lord's table who make the "loud profession." By their acts, if not by their words, they proclaim that they are good enough without repentance; that they can get along very well without Christ and His atoning blood; that they do not need the help and saving power of Christ in the Communion. But we who come to the table confess that we are sinners.

Does any one feel that he is good enough to come to the Lord's Supper? Then he is in the most perilous condition—that of self-righteousness. But do you feel unworthy? Then you are the most worthy, for then you renounce your own worthiness, and rely solely on the merits of Christ and the grace of God. None of us are worthy in and of ourselves to come to the Holy Sacrament; our sufficiency is entirely of God through Christ Jesus, our Redeemer. In coming to the Lord's table we also confess:

2. *That Christ alone can save us.*

This means that we are not only sinners, but such helpless and heinous sinners that we can do nothing to save ourselves; that Christ, the Son of God, had to die to make satisfaction for our sins, and thus redeem us from the curse and condemnation of the law. "In due time Christ died for the ungodly," and to that class we belong; and that is what we say every time we celebrate this sacrament. The Lord

said in instituting the Holy Supper: "This is my body, which was given for you; this is my blood, which was shed for the remission of your sins." In the absolution service we make this humble confession. Flinging away all thought of our own righteousness, we declare in utmost humility, and yet with sacred joy:

"My hope is built on nothing less
Than Jesus' blood and righteousness;
I dare not trust the sweetest frame,
But wholly lean on Jesus' name;
On Christ, the Solid Rock, I stand;
All other ground is sinking sand."

II. The Blessed Eucharist is a Commemoration.

This is the second capital C of the sacrament. In it we commemorate something. We know what that means. On the fourth of July we commemorate the declaration of the independence of our country. On Thanksgiving Day we commemorate the goodness of God in providence and grace for the year. At Christmas we commemorate the birth of Christ. In the Lord's Supper, as the apostle declares, we "show forth the Lord's death till He come." At the institution of the Holy Supper Christ said to His disciples, "Do this in remembrance of me."

So we are here this evening to recall what Christ has done for us and for our salvation. We might ask why Christ wanted to be remembered by His disciples. Perhaps His human nature was like our own in this respect. We want to be remembered; we do not want to be forgotten, especially by our loved ones. How often we say: "Remember me to such and such a friend!" Perhaps you once had a loved one who was lying on a dying bed. Before his spirit was called away, he gave you a token or souvenir, and said: "My dear one, whenever you look at this, remember me." I wonder whether Jesus, the loving Friend of sinners, did not cherish such a tender, longing feeling toward His disciples.

But that was not the chief reason why He wanted to be remembered. He knew it would be for the good of His people for them to remember Him. You and I cannot think of

some good and pure person, a sainted father or mother, for example, without being made better; we cannot think of them in their robes of white, and at the same time indulge in impure thoughts. So our Saviour knew it would have a wholesome, salutary, purifying effect to remember Him, the White Christ, the Holy and Spotless One; the One who always went about doing good; who blessed the little children; who drank the cup of our woes in Gethsemane; who died for our sins on Calvary. Who is not made better by such reflections? Yes, Jesus had our welfare in mind when He said, "This do in remembrance of me." So, in instituting the Holy Supper, He used the elements of bread and wine, to make it all the easier for us to remember Him and His dying agony on the cross.

"According to thy gracious Word,
In meek humility,
This will I do, my dying Lord,
I will remember Thee.

"Thy body, broken for my sake,
My bread from heaven shall be;
Thy testamental cup I take,
And thus remember Thee.

"Gethsemane can I forget?
Or there Thy conflict see,
Thine agony and bloody sweat,
And not remember Thee?

"When to the cross I turn mine eyes,
And rest on Calvary,
O Lamb of God, my Sacrifice!
I must remember Thee."

And now we will reflect on the third and last C of the Holy Eucharist.

III. The Lord's Supper is a Communion.

We have seen that it is a Confession and a Commemeration; it is also a Communion. That is what it is often called—the Holy Communion. With whom do we have communion when we come to the Lord's table?

1. *With Christ Himself.*

He is present at this feast—really and truly present.

In our Lutheran theology we call His presence here "the real presence." We mean that He is not personally absent somewhere in heaven and only present by substitution or proxy—that is, through or by the Holy Spirit. In other sermons of this series* we have cited the many Biblical texts which speak about Christ Himself being present with us, as, for example: "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world." This must mean Christ Himself, the God-man, the Incarnate Son of God; not merely the pre-incarnated Logos; not merely the Deity of Christ, as if Christ could be divided, His glorified human nature in one place and His divine person in another. No! no! "He ascended far above all heavens that He might fill all things." Then He must be present in His whole theanthropic person in His Holy Supper.

Why, in the very institution of the sacrament He said of the bread, "This is my body;" and of the fruit of the vine, "This is my blood." Paul taught the same precious doctrine: "The cup which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? And the bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?" So Christ must be present in His glorified human nature, or He could not impart His body and His blood. The meaning is, that He is present in His glorified, though invisible, form, and comes into our hearts to hold precious communion with us.

It is the Lord's feast. Would He be absent from the banquet which He Himself has spread? He is our host; we His guests. What would you think of a host who would invite you to a feast, and then would absent himself from it? So our Master is here with us in His own ordinance. Do not think of Him tonight as far off somewhere in the heavens, bound like a slave, as it were, to a throne, from which He cannot break away; no! but rather think of Him as right here, communicating Himself to you and holding sweet spiritual fellowship with your soul.

*Sermon XXXIII, Div. I; XXXV, Div. IV; XXXVII, Div. I.

"Here at Thy table, Lord, we meet
To feed on food divine:
Thy body is the bread we eat,
Thy precious blood the wine.

"He that prepares this rich repast
Himself comes down and dies;
And then invites us thus to feast
Upon the sacrifice."

Much more might be said on this holy doctrine; but time warns us to conclude. In the Holy Supper Christians also have—

2. *Communion with one another.*

The Apostles' Creed calls the Church "the communion of saints." There is no place where God's people come closer together than in the blessed Communion. Here "saint holds fellowship with saint." Here we can say and sing: "Blest be the tie that binds our hearts in Christian love." This sacrament has had a most potent influence in the whole history of the Church in binding God's people together and to their Lord. Indeed, it is doubtful whether the Church would not long ago have perished by her inner dissensions, had it not been for the frequent celebration of the Lord's Supper, when church members had to lay aside their quarrels and grudges, and come together in the fellowship of forgiving love at His table.

How often the communion of God's people at this season is most precious! How often we truly feel that "the fellowship of kindred minds is like to that above!" At this feast of love we may say:

"Before our Father's throne
We pour our ardent prayers;
Our fears, our hopes, our aims are one,
Our comforts and our cares.

"We share our mutual woes,
Our mutual burdens bear;
And often for each other flows
The sympathizing tear."

May this be a season of real heart-to-heart communion both with our Lord and Master and with our fellow-Christians!

XXVIII

GOOD FRIDAY

THE DIVINE REASON OF THE CROSS

Text: John 18:1–19:42

We have now come to the most solemn time in following in the Redeemer's footsteps through the Christian Year. It is Good Friday. Sad as the day is when we contemplate the sufferings of our Saviour, yet it is appropriately named—*Good* Friday. However bitter was His anguish at the time, it was truly *Good* Friday for this poor, sin-cursed world. On that day sin was atoned for; on that day love flowed freely from the divine Father heart upon us miserable offenders; on that day the condemnation of the law of justice was lifted from every believer; on that day mercy and truth met on the cross and kissed each other; on that day "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself." Sad day! Happy day!

"See, from His head, His hands, His feet,
Sorrow and love flow mingled down!
Did e'er such love and sorrow meet,
Or thorns compose so rich a crown?"

Our gospel selection for today comprises a large part of the passion history. The Old Testament lesson (Isa. 52:13-53:12) agrees with the gospel, giving the same recital in prophetic form. It would be impossible to follow these selections in detail in a single sermon; therefore we glean from them the theme, "The Divine Reason of the Cross," and desire to speak to you on the subject of the vicarious atonement which Christ wrought for the world in His sacrifice and suffering. Before dealing with the true doctrine, we must mention some inadequate views that are current today.*

*The doctrine of the atonement is so vital, so central in Christianity that we give references to some important books on the subject.

I. Erroneous Theories of the Atonement.

1. There is what we may call *the placating theory.*

This is a view that is often wrongly fastened upon the orthodox party by the liberalists. You know how men will often set up "a man of straw" and then take keen delight in proceeding to annihilate him. This view is that Christ died to placate the wrath or resentful feelings of God, the Father, who was very angry on account of men's sins, and therefore had to wreak His vengeance on some one. So Christ stepped in, and in man's stead became the victim of His wrath. This theory represents Christ as beneficent and kind, but the Father as most unloving and vindictive.

The Bible does not teach this view, nor does orthodoxy hold it. It is a travesty on the evangelical view. While God is often represented in the Bible as angry at sin, yet it is not the anger of resentment or petty spite, but that of righteous indignation; in other words, it is the reaction of God's holiness against sin. What would you think of a God who was not indignant at moral evil? Could you respect Him?

But the Bible represents God as loving sinners; as exceedingly desirous of saving them. The coming of Christ into the world was the result and outflow of God's love. Note the classical passage (John 3:16): "God so *loved* the world that He gave His only begotten Son," etc. Then this follows: "For God sent not His Son into the world to con-

Among Lutheran authors we name the following: Schmid's "Doctrinal Theology of the Lutheran Church," translated by Jacobs and Hay (there is nothing better, even if it does give the discussions of the old Lutheran theologians, like Gerhard, Quenstedt, Koenig, Hutterus, Hollazius, etc.); Jacobs' "Elements of the Christian Religion" and "A Summary of the Christion Faith" (in loco); Remensnyder's "The Atonement and Modern Thought;" Graebner's "Outline of Doctrinal Theology;" Voigt's "Biblical Dogmatics" (in loco); the author's "The Rational Test," Chapter VIII (a succinct statement) and "A System of Christian Ethics" (in loco). Among non-Lutheran authors we recommend Hodge's "The Atonement" (Calvinistic, but sound on satisfaction and the quid pro quo doctrine); Stalker's "The Atonement;" Mabie's "The Divine Reason of the Cross;" Mozley's "The Doctrine of the Atonement;" Denney's "The Death of Christ;" "The Atonement and the Modern Mind;" "The Christian Doctrine of Reconciliation."

demn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved." Note what Paul says (Rom. 5:8): "For God commendeth His *love* toward us in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." And again (Rom. 8:31, 32): "What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us? He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?" Read also verses 38 and 39 of the same chapter. Christ Himself taught us that God loves us and is our Father. Christ died, not to *make* God love us, but *because* God loved us. Those who misunderstand and misrepresent the evangelical doctrine of the atonement ought to read some of the hymns of the orthodox Church, to learn just what doctrine she holds:

"Sing we then eternal love,
Such as did the Father move;
He beheld the world undone,
Loved the world, and gave His Son.

"Sing the Son's amazing love;
How He left the realms above,
Took our nature and our place,
Lived and died to save our race.

"Sing we, too, the Spirit's love;
With our stubborn hearts He strove,
Filled our mind with grief and fear,
Brought the precious Saviour near."

2. Next we must examine *the moral influence theory.*

This view, held by Horace Bushnell and others, is a popular theory among the liberal thinkers. It is this: Christ did not die to make expiation for sin, for God can simply forgive the penitent sinner with requiring satisfaction to the law of justice. Christ came into the world, lived a self-sacrificing life, and died a martyr's death on the cross, to show how much He and the Father loved us.

But this theory is un-Biblical, superficial and unmoral, if not immoral, even though it is called the "moral "influence theory. Why? Because the Bible teaches plainly that Christ's death was a propitiation for sin (Rom. 3:25; 1 John 2:2; 4:10); that Christ gave His life "a ransom for

many;" that He "died for the remission of sins;" that He "tasted death for every man." Later we shall quote other relevant passages.

Ethically the "moral influence" view is far astray. It says that God could forgive sin by a simple act of His will without requiring satisfaction to the principle of justice; that is, God's omnipotent love could simply wave aside His justice. What kind of a God would that be—one who would set up one eternal divine attribute against another! Is God actuated by the principle that "might makes right?" For God to set aside justice by His mercy would create a moral schism in Himself and in His whole moral economy. Such a diremption in God's being would destroy Him. Besides, if God does not respect His moral law, would His creatures be likely to respect it?

A fatal objection to the moral influence theory is that it would make Christ's display of love on the cross *spectacular*. It was not really necessary for Him to suffer there; He did it only to make an *exhibition* of His love.

Who would want such a theatrical and ostentatious display as that? Suppose a husband should some day come home with his face terribly bruised and lacerated. When his wife in great concern inquired the cause of his ghastly wounds, suppose he should say, "I did this myself to show you how much I love you!" What do you suppose she would think of such a procedure? Would she appreciate it? Or would she not, rather, doubt his sanity? But suppose, on the other hand, that she should become seriously ill, and then he would watch by her bedside by day and by night, making every possible sacrifice for her, and thus should win her safely back to health again. Ah! then she would not need to ask why he had done all that for her sake; his actions would speak for themselves.

And so with Christ; if He suffered and died merely to make an exhibition of His love, we do not care for such histrionic display; but if He really took our place, really suffered for us, really bore the penalty of our sins to save us,

ah, then how winsome, how appealing, how touching was His exhibition of pity and love!

3. Then there is *the governmental theory.*

This theory was advocated by Hugo Grotius. It is better than the foregoing theories, but is also inadequate. It holds that God might have remitted sin by merely forgiving it, without requiring satisfaction to the moral law; but, lest men should lose their respect for the law, He devised the plan of sending His Son to suffer somewhat, just to show that His law could not be trampled upon with impunity.

Do you not see at once the fundamental weakness of this theory? It makes the death of Christ only a makeshift, an expedient. God might have saved the world in some other way. It was not absolutely necessary in the very nature of a moral economy for Him to suffer and die. Do you want to be saved by a makeshift? I do not. This view is open also to the objection that it makes Christ's suffering spectacular; He suffered only to show that God's law cannot be despised. We turn sadly away from such parade, and feel that it is unreal; it displays affectation rather than holy affection.

4. A few moments only can be given to what is known as *the penitential theory.*

A number of English liberalists have recently advanced this view. It is that Christ repented for us. In some way He took our sins upon Him, and then became penitent, and thus, in some obscure way, put away our iniquities and saved us from them.

How utterly unethical is this hypothesis! If Christ repented in any real sense, He must have sinned in a real sense. That would make our Lord a sinner. But the Scriptures teach that He was sinless: "without sin;" "separate from sinners;" "the spotless Lamb of God;" "who did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth."

Moreover, if Christ repented for us, then we not need repent. But Christ said: "Repent ye, and believe the gospel;" "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish."

No! no! Christ did not repent for us, because the Bible everywhere enjoins repentance upon us. Christ suffered and died for a vastly different purpose, a real one, a fundamental and necessary one. Let us now see what it was.

II. The True View of the Atonement.

Why did Christ hang there on the rugged cross of Calvary on the first Good Friday in the world's history? Not for a show; not for a spectacle; not for an expedient; not for a hazy, obscure purpose. What is the true Biblical doctrine of the atonement? It is this: Christ was our Substitute; His sufferings and death were vicarious; He took our place; He endured the penalties of the law in our stead to spare us from enduring them.

To put it in another way, from what did Christ save us by His piacular sufferings? Not from repentance, for we must repent; not from our guilt, for even in eternity we shall acknowledge that *we* were the guilty ones; but from the penalty of our transgressions. The only way to punish sin is by imposing suffering. Where there is no suffering for sin, there is no punishment. We appeal to the whole criminal docket of our civil courts in proof of the assertion.

Now this blessed doctrine of substitution is taught in many Biblical passages, and, moreover, corresponds with the whole analogy of faith. All the Old Testament sacrifices and offerings, from the Passover lamb to every beast and bird "on Jewish altars slain," points to the doctrine of atonement by substitution, and thus finds its archetype in Christ, the "Lamb of God that beareth away the sins of the world." There can be no doubt that Isaiah fifty-three is a Messianic prophecy. If it is not, it has no meaning; it is only idle raving. See how the doctrine of substitution runs all through its throbbing lines: "He was wounded *for* our transgressions; He was bruised *for* our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was *upon* Him; and with His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; and the Lord hath laid *on Him* the iniquity of us all."

Christ Himself said that He came "to give His life a

ransom for many." And all of us know what a "ransom" is. Observe Paul's mode of reasoning (Rom. 3:23-26): "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in His blood to declare His righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; to declare at this time His righteousness; that He might be just, and the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus." No less explicit is another apostle (1 John 2:1, 2): "And if any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ, the righteous: and He is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but for the sins of the whole world." And Peter agrees with his fellow-apostles (1 Pet. 2:24): "Who His own self bare our sins in His body on the tree, that we, having died unto sins, might live unto righteousness; by whose stripes ye were healed."

Many, many more proof-texts might be cited; but these are ample to prove the Biblical doctrine of the atonement to be that Christ endured our punishment as our self-sacrificing and loving Substitute.

And now we may ask, Why was such vicarious endurance necessary in God's plan of redeeming grace and love? The answer is: For profound ethical reasons. God's economy is a moral economy. That is its highest quality and glory. A merely mechanical universe would have been worth little, and would have shown only God's power. But holiness, righteousness and love are higher attributes. Man's moral and rational qualities are what lift him above the mere mechanism of the cosmos and the animal creation. Moral and spiritual excellence is the highest kind of excellence. When the Bible says, "Righteousness and justice are the foundation of His throne," it assigns to God the noblest and most exalted attributes.

Now when man sinned, He at once came under the condemnation of eternal justice, which must punish the offender. We see this principle in life everywhere. The law of

justice must never be set aside. In some ethical way its demands must be met. But that meant the eternal punishment of man, the sinner. However, God is a God of love as well as of justice; and so He desired to save man. But how could man, the sinner, be saved without derogation to, or violation of, the eternal principle of righteousness?

Ah! divine love and wisdom found the way. God, Himself the foundation of the moral law, saw that He could Himself, out of love for man, take upon Himself, in the person of His eternally begotten Son, the penalty of man's offenses. It was out of love that He made the sacrifice, and it was to uphold His moral government that the sacrifice had to be made. Had God merely waved aside the principle of justice by an act of omnipotence, He would have created an antinomy in His own being, and would have violated His own moral law, and so would have brought ruin upon Himself and His creation. But thanks be to God! He knew how to show mercy and uphold justice at the same time.

So He gave His only begotten Son, who came to earth, assumed our humanity, endued it with infinite value and capacity for suffering, by virtue of the union of His divine person with it, and thus became our Daysman, our atoning Saviour, taking the penalty of our sins upon Himself. This He could do for the whole world because He was both God and man—man, that He might suffer as humanity would have had to suffer; God, that His suffering might be an equivalent before the principle of righteousness. Thus God "could be just, and yet the justifier of every one that believes on Jesus Christ."

How else could God's moral economy have been upheld? It is profoundly ethical, this marvelous plan of redemption. At the same time it reveals the infinite love of the Triune God. Why should we not accept our gracious Redeemer who thus suffered and died for us? Why find fault with His plan? Are we not the beneficiaries of it? If Christ paid our debt, let us accept the payment with grateful hearts; and, because we are saved solely by His free and fraternal grace, let us devote to Him the service of our lives.

"When I survey the wondrous cross
On which the Prince of glory died,
My richest gain I count but loss,
And pour contempt on all my pride.

"Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast,
Save in the death of Christ, my God!
All the vain things that charm me most
I sacrifice them to His blood.

"Were the whole realm of nature mine,
That were a tribute for too small;
Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all."

XXIX

EASTER

THE REDEEMER'S TRIUMPH

Text: Mark 16:1-8

After recounting our Redeemer's foretaste of triumph on Palm Sunday, and His apparent defeat on Good Friday, we may now celebrate His victory on Easter, when He broke the bands of death, led captivity captive, and came forth from the tomb in the plenitude of life. Well may the whole Christian Church today sing its *Jubilate!* Every Christian heart may join in the Easter hymn:

"All hail the glorious morn
That saw the Saviour rise,
With victory bright adorned,
And triumph in His eyes!
Ye saints, extol your risen Lord,
And sing His praise with one accord."

The Easter gospel recites briefly but vividly the account of the visit of the women to Christ's tomb on the morning of His resurrection. Let us first notice their sincere devotion and simple faith, and then pass on to consider the meaning and purpose of Christ's resurrection in the divine plan of redemption.

I. The Devotion and Faith of the Women.

They came early in the morning—that is, just as soon as possible after the Jewish Sabbath. This implies that they had waited longingly through the hours of the Sabbath, and then rose early to perform their loving task. They came with their spices to anoint the body of Christ. They did not mind the expense or the trouble because of the love they felt for their dead friend. Even though His death was a severe shock to them and a keen disappointment, they did not lose their love for Him. In their simple, natural way they proved their confidence in His goodness, sincerity and

friendship, whatever they may have thought of the authority of His claims to be the Messiah.

We cannot help commending the simple, unquestioning devotion of these women. If there were more such faith today, the world would be better, and the kingdom of faith would be more surely advanced. Now-a-days we must stop and see a reason for everything we do. We are so afraid of being credulous and fanatical that we often fail to have any faith at all. In these rationalistic days we forget that we are to walk by faith and not by sight. It would be worth while to give genuine, unquestioning faith the right of way at times, and see whether we would not make more progress in Christian experience and power, and walk less falteringly in the way of life. We have not yet really tried the power of faith to see how many moral and spiritual victories it would win for us.

Notice, next, that mingled with their childlike faith there was much lack of comprehension. There is what would be called a real *naivete* in both their faith and their unfaith, as well as in their blindness. We cannot help wondering how they could believe so much without believing more. Had not Christ told them He must be put to death, and that He would rise again? Yet they come with spices on Easter morn to anoint His dead body, and wonder innocently who shall roll the stone away from the opening of the tomb! Had their faith been rugged and thorough-going, they would have come expecting to see their risen Lord. They certainly deserved the gentle rebuke more than once on Christ's lips, "Oh, ye of little faith!"

Yet observe that Christ did not cast them off because of their lack of comprehending faith. He rewarded them later with a vision of Himself. May we not learn from this incident that our gentle, loving Lord is pleased even with a little faith, if it is sincere and simple, and that from such a seed principle He is able to build a strong and conquering faith? Still more, does it not prove His divinity that He is able to take such a weak and faltering faith as the women and the disciples had at this time, and convert it into

the faith that brought thousands to their knees on Pentecost, and that in less than three centuries conquered the Roman empire?

Their great devotion and simple faith were still further rewarded. The stone was rolled away—one of the other gospels tells how this was done, thus supplementing and corroborating St. Mark's account—an angel appeared in the sepulcher, assured them Christ was risen, and then entrusted them with a blessed and important mission: "Go, tell His disciples and Peter," etc. Thus Christ, through the angel, made use of the faith they had. He did not ask them to do some great thing far beyond their faith, but they could run quickly and tell the disciples to repair to Galilee, where their risen Lord would meet them. Other gospels inform us that they carried out their commission. So we may learn that Christ blesses even weak faith, and gives it something to do in order that it may be strengthened, and so qualified for greater tasks. So, as the Augsburg Confession teaches, it is not great and erudite faith that is needed to qualify us to come to the Holy Supper, but even weak faith, providing it is directed to Christ.

We will next analyze the fact recited so vividly in our text in a more general way. What is the blessed doctrine of the resurrection? That it was a resurrection of Christ's real body there can be no doubt, for afterward He requested His disciples to touch and handle Him, saying (Luke 24:39): "A spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me having." Now, the question is, Why would not a mere spiritual resurrection have been enough? Why must Christ rise bodily from the tomb? Is this also a part of God's redemptive plan?

II. The Meaning and Purpose of the Resurrection.

1. *It is a beautiful symbol.*

Almost every miracle is also a parable; it may be used to illustrate facts and experiences in the spiritual realm. So the resurrection of Christ is an expressive symbol of our resurrection from the death of sin in this life; for Paul

says that, as we are buried with Christ in baptism, so we are to rise with Him into newness of life. This means spiritual resurrection. There is a sense, therefore, in which we may make every day an Easter Day—that is, we may daily rise from a lower state of grace and spiritual life to a higher.

2. *It destroyed the last enemy.*

Our Lord came to "destroy all the works of the devil." But Satan, by inveigling our first parents into sin, caused the death of the body, and thus the separation of soul and body in death. If Christ had come to redeem the soul only, the evil one would have gained at least a partial victory, and the Scriptures would not be absolutely true. But when the "last enemy, which is death," shall be destroyed, Christ's victory over Satan will be complete.

3. *It affords convincing proof of Christ's messiahship and divinity.*

The resurrection has great apologetic value. Without it, so far as we can see, the mission of Christ would have ended in failure. But by His rising from the dead He proved to His disciples that He was the Messiah. Look at their daunted faith right after His death. They had trusted that it was He who would restore Israel. Now their hopes were blasted, their faith almost eclipsed. Listen to Peter as he says hopelessly: "I go a-fishing." Now look at the same Peter and his fellow-apostles on the day of Pentecost preaching a risen Lord and Saviour! How account for the change? They had seen the risen Lord. So when we know it to be an actual, historic fact that Christ conquered death, we also have an invulnerable basis for our faith in the messiahship and divinity of Christ the Lord.

4. *It proved the doctrine of the soul's immortality.*

In fact, by His resurrection Christ proved that man is all immortal. But how would His bodily resurrection prove the immortality of the soul? Because if His body came forth alive from the tomb, that would mean that His soul

must also be alive and active. Suppose He had not risen; suppose His body had remained dead in the grave, and His soul had merely gone to God, how could the disciples have been assured that His soul was still living? But when they saw His living body, they knew it must be animated by the soul. When subsequently they saw Him ascend bodily, they knew that both soul and body were destined to immortality. So when we know by historical evidence that Christ really arose from the dead on the first Easter morning, we have indubitable assurance of the immortality of both the soul and the body. What a living hope the Easter season gives us!

5. *It is the guarantee and effective cause of our bodily resurrection.*

This is the clear teaching of God's Word. A large part of the fifteenth Chapter of First Corinthians is occupied in proving that, because our Lord rose from the dead, we shall also rise. Says Paul: "Now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the first fruits of them that slept." Christ also said: "Because I live, ye shall live also."

But some one may ask, "Why must we have resurrected and glorified bodies? Why should we not live forever as pure disembodied spirits?"

We answer, Because man was originally created a dual being, with a body and a soul. If Satan by his temptation procured the separation of the body and soul, Christ must secure their reunion, or Satan's plan would be partially succesful.

More than that, the soul was created to fit into the organism of the body. Therefore it would be defective without its companion-piece. And lastly, according to the Bible (Isa. 11:6-9; Rom. 8:18-23; 2 Pet. 3:8-13), the time will come when the natural realm shall be redeemed from its present imperfect state, and shall be glorified; then we ourselves shall need a proper organ—that is, a glorified body—with which to have a vital and organic relation with it. God's redemptive plan is universal, it is cosmic. And

this springs another most important and interesting question:

What about the resurrection body that we shall have when the last Easter morning shall break in glory over the world? The Bible teaches plainly that we shall have such a body, and that it will be glorious like unto Christ's glorified body, and that is enough to satisfy our faith. But how wonderfully science illumines the truths of the Bible! Science teaches that there is a universal ether, so refined and exalted that it is perfectly mobile, elastic and pliant; so refined, indeed, that the heavenly bodies can swing through it with inconceivable velocity without friction; yet in its totality it is so strong that it holds the stars and planets in their paths as they swing through space.

This is the elemental substance from which all palpable and ponderable substances are formed. It occupies all the space not occupied by stars, planets, comets, meteors, and other solids, liquids and fluids. It carries the light on its buoyant wings; it is the bearer of electricity and heat, and the basis of gravitation.

Now, what if our resurrected and glorified bodies should be made of this beautiful primordial substance which God originally created, would it not be perfectly pliant to the soul's every volition, and at the same time form a real medium through which the soul could communicate with the palpable material of the universe? It is not mind, remember that; it is matter, real material substance; but it is so refined and sublimated as to be the perfect instrument of the redeemed and purified soul. Perhaps that is what Paul meant when he said: "It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual (*pneumatikon*) body." That is, a body perfectly adapted to the spirit about which it is organized. So the inductions of science, even of speculative science, are coming closer and closer to Biblical teaching.

Now, it is when death, the last enemy, has been overcome, and our whole being, body and soul, shall be completely restored, that we shall be able to exclaim with Paul: "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy vic-

tory? The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!"

"My flesh shall slumber in the ground
Till the last trumpet's joyful sound;
Then burst the chains with glad surprise,
And in my Saviour's image rise."

Let us listen to the apostle's rapt recital (Phil 3:20, 21): "For our citizenship is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body, according to the working whereby He is able even to subdue all things unto Himself."

XXX

THE FIRST SUNDAY AFTER EASTER

CHRIST ALLAYING DOUBT

Text: John 20:19-31

We are now entering upon those forty wonderful days in Christ's career which intervened between His resurrection and His ascension. What is their significance in God's redemptive plan? During those days Jesus was able to do two essential things for His apostles, and hence for the world: First, to afford them indubitable evidence that He had risen from the dead, and therefore was the Messiah, thus allaying in their minds the last vestige of doubt; second, to complete His instruction to them, and thus send them forth fully equipped to carry out His great commission to "go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation." These two purposes come out very clearly in our impressive gospel lesson for today, describing the first of those wonderful days. There are two great features of the pericope to which we shall call attention.

I. Christ Allaying the Doubts of His Disciples.

It is most interesting to observe His method of doing this. He did not treat their doubts with lofty scorn or dogmatic contempt. He did not say, "There are no honest doubters." No; He sought to allay their doubts, and reestablish their faith, by real and palpable evidence. On this notable day all the apostles (except Thomas) were assembled in a certain room, and for fear of the Jews, they had closed all the doors. Then suddenly Jesus came and stood before them, and said, "Peace be unto you." "And when He had so said, He showed unto them His hands and His side. Then were the disciples glad, when they saw the Lord."

Here are many interesting subjects for thought, but we cannot tarry. The point is, He gave them tangible evi-

dence that He was alive. He accommodated Himself to their need and weakness. Remember, not to their sins and errors. He never did that. But to their limitations. He gave these proofs to their physical senses, because at that point in their spiritual development they needed that kind of evidence.* The last verse of our text(which is also the last verse of the gospel according to St. John) indicates precisely why Christ appeared so often to His disciples: "And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book: But these are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing, ye might have life through His name."

The sequel proves that He was right. After those appearances, the apostles had no more doubt of His Messiahship. Before that they were full of doubts and misgivings, and that made them moral and physical cowards; after that, they never lost faith or courage; they stood before their fiercest persecutors and preached Christ and the resurrection. This proves that Christ's pedagogical method was the right one. We would ask the skeptic how else the Christian religion could have ever been established in the world, and yet retain its purely ethical and spiritual character.

A week later, Thomas now being present, they are again assembled within closed doors, and Christ again comes to give them physical assurance that He has risen from the dead. This was necessary, for had He appeared only once, they might have fallen into doubt again. He, therefore, appeared often enough to give them absolute assurance. Here He convinces Thomas, and He does it in a tender and pathetic way that is perfectly winsome. "Thomas, reach hither thy hand . . . . and be not faithless, but believing." Whether Thomas really reached forth his hand or not, we do not know, but he did exclaim, "My Lord and my God!" The confession was, as it were, wrung from him, but he was doubting Thomas nevermore.

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*See note at the end of the sermon.

Even after that memorable evening Christ performed many other signs (verse 30), and John recorded some of them to establish faith in Christ as the Son of God and the Giver of life. Thus we see Christ's method. He used miracle as long as it was needed to plant the mustard seed of the kingdom of God in the earth.

But now notice our Lord's wonderful intimation of a higher basis for faith in Him. After Thomas' ejaculation, Christ said to him: "Because thou hast seen thou hast believed; blessed they that have not seen, and have believed." The "are" and the "yet" are not in the original; the saying is more emphatic without them.

What does Christ mean by that? Ah! He refers to the dispensation of the Holy Spirit; to the higher kind of spiritual experience; that of the inner consciousness; the kind of assurance that Paul had after he had grown in spiritual grace and knowledge: "The Spirit Himself beareth witness with our spirits that we are the children of God;" "Christ in you, the hope of glory;" "I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me." Yes, the inner witness of the Spirit is better, clearer, surer, more spiritual evidence than that of the senses. Hence today we do not need outer miracles to give us assurance; it is the dispensation of the Holy Spirit, when Christ is saying to us, "Blessed are ye who believe, and have not seen." Our God knows what are the supremest spiritual values.

II. Christ Conferring Power on His Disciples.

First our Lord reinstated His disciples' faith; then He conferred power upon them, and gave them a part of their commission. He said to them again: "Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you." This is the logical order: first they must have peace in their own souls; then, and only then, can they go forth preaching with assurance and authority. After that, He endued them with the necessary power. He breathed on them, and said: "Receive ye the Holy Ghost: whosesoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto then; and whosesoever sins ye retain, they are retained."

These words require brief exposition. What is their meaning? We must remember that the apostles bore a special relation to Christ and His Church. In speaking of the various gifts of the Spirit, Paul says (1 Cor. 12:28): "And God hath set some in the Church, first apostles, secondly prophets, thirdly teachers," etc. Now in this place He conferred on His apostles the special gift of speaking and writing by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. At another place (John 16:13, 14) Christ made this promise: "Howbeit when He, the Spirit of truth, is come, He will guide you into all truth: for He shall not speak of Himself; but whatsoever He shall hear, that shall He speak; and He will show you things to come. He shall glorify me: for He shall receive of mine and shall show it unto you." A similar promise is given in Luke 12:11, 12: "And when they shall bring you before the synagogues and the rulers and the authorities, be not anxious how or what ye shall answer, or what ye shall say; for the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what ye ought to say." (Compare also Matt. 10:19, 20; Mark 13:11; Luke 21:14, 15.)

Thus the apostles were to be infallibly inspired when they spoke and wrote. This promise was fulfilled especially when they wrote the New Testament. If the rationalistic critics object to this interpretation, we would ask them, Then when *was* Christ's promise of the infallible guidance of the Holy Spirit fulfilled? If it was not fulfilled in writing the New Testament, it was never fulfilled at all; and that would destroy Christ's Messiahship and Divinity. But we do not so regard our Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, if Christ conferred on His apostles the inspiration to declare in the New Testament the gospel and the terms of salvation, did He not, in a most vital sense, give them the keys of the kingdom of heaven? In declaring those terms, it was literally true that the apostles had the power to remit and retain sins. When the Holy Spirit led St. Mark (under the direction of Paul) to write (16:15, 16) Christ's last commission, he (Mark) was opening and closing God's kingdom with the keys of the gospel. So Peter

on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:38) declared the remission and retention of sins through the infallible power of the Holy Spirit; for he said: "Repent, and be baptized every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." So Paul and Silas handled the keys of the kingdom of heaven when they said to the Philippian jailor (Acts 16:31): "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house." In many other cases the inspired apostles declared the precise terms of pardon and salvation. They did not handle the keys by their own authority, but by virtue of their divine enduement according to Christ's promise.

What, now, is the relation of the Church today toward the keys—the power to remit and retain sins. She has them in the New Testament, which sets forth infallibly the gospel and the terms of salvation. Whenever she in any way announces the gospel, she administers the keys; she opens and closes the door of salvation. Here are several simple instances. When a minister or a layman says, "Except ye repent, ye shall all perish," he administers the keys. When he says, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; He that believeth not shall be condemned," he opens and closes the door of salvation. Therefore the minister pronounces absolution when he says, in the preparatory service of the Lutheran Church: "And upon this humble confession which you have made, I, as a minister of His Church and by His authority, declare unto you who do repent and believe in Him, the entire forgiveness of all your sins, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen."

This is what is meant in our Church by confession and absolution. When a minister meets an individual and declares to him the gospel terms of pardon and salvation, not on his own authority, but on the authority of God's Word, we call it *private* confession and absolution. This must be carefully distinguished from the *auricular* confession and *priestly* absolution of the Roman Catholic Church, which

we totally reject both as a doctrine and a practice. But to declare to troubled souls, on the authority of God's Word, that, if they truly repent and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, God will and does pardon and save them, is a most important and precious service.

What a solemn responsibility rests upon the Church, and especially upon her ministers! They are entrusted with the gospel of salvation. On their preaching and teaching devolves the eternal well-being of souls. They ought to be faithful in declaring "the whole counsel of God." They should be "apt to teach." It is their duty to cheer, persuade, and warn with all long-suffering and diligence. They should preach to the edification of believers and to the admonition and conversion of sinners. They are God's watchmen upon the walls of Zion, and should never fail to sound the trumpet.

"Let Zion's watchmen all awake,
And take th' alarm they give;
Now let them from the mouth of God
Their solemn charge receive.

"'Tis not a cause of small import
The pastor's care demands;
But what might fill an angel's heart,
And filled a Saviour's hands.

"They watch for souls, for which the Lord
Did heavenly bliss forego;
For souls which must forever live
In rapture or in woe.

"May they that Jesus, whom they preach,
Their own Redeemer see;
And watch Thou daily o'er their souls,
That they may watch for thee."

NOTE—Were the author preaching to some audiences, especially before hearers who were interested in the science of the day, and who might entertain doubts regarding the supernatural, he would not hesitate to introduce, at this or some other relevant point in the sermon, the modern scientific theory of matter, to throw light on the Epiphanies of Christ during those marvelous forty days between His resurrection and ascension. How was it that He appeared and disappeared so suddenly? Where was He in the meantime? In what form did He exist? Science here greatly illumines the problem.

The "universal ether" of science is the primordial material which God created in the beginning of time. Its extremely subtile and mobile quality is described in the latter part of the Easter sermon. It is the

source and substratum of all the palpable material of the universe. According to science, how was tangible material formed from the universal ether?

In this way: The ether, which was doubtless quiescent at first, was set in motion either in many places, or in one immense space in the universe. This motion took the form of innumerable whorls or vortices, which formed ions; from these electrons were produced; these again combined into atoms; and the atoms in turn formed molecules, which, variously combined, constitute all the diverse palpable substances of the cosmos.

Now, how was the original motion in the subliminal ether started? Matter is inert; it cannot move itself. Mind is the only entity that has the power of self-movement, and of originating motion in material substance. Every person can prove, by an effort of his will, that mind has this wonderful capacity. Therefore God, who is the eternal Mind or Spirit, must have set the vortices in motion, and must also have directed the subsequent process, else there would have been no order and purpose in the result.

But how does this theory help to explain the sudden appearances and disappearances of Christ during those forty days? Our reply is: At His resurrection His body was transformed into the original glorious form of matter, namely, the subliminal ether. Therefore it was invisible and intangible to human senses. In order to bring about an Epiphany which the disciples could behold with their fleshly eyes, God could easily change Christ's subliminal body into a palpable body, just He produced the ponderable material of the universe from the ethereal substance which He originally created. Then, when the manifestation had served its purpose, Christ's body would again be translated into its exalted ethereal state. Hence He was present with them all the time in this heavenly way, but only at divinely chosen intervals in tangible form.

This may be called speculation, and it is. But it is the theory of the best scientific thought of the day, and is the best working hypothesis yet adopted. He who laughs it to scorn laughs at the best and most serious modern science, and has no theory of his own to put in its stead. Science has certainly proved by actual experiment that there are forms of matter so extremely rare and refined that they are almost like mental substance itself. Paul says of the resurrection body of the saints: "It is raised a pneumatikon (spiritual) body." Who knows but that these subtile forms of matter may be the mediating element between mind and palpable material?

Let it be understood, however, that these matters of science should be taken into the pulpit only when the minister is convinced that a good service can be done by such presentation. "Let every man be persuaded in his own mind."

XXXI

THE SECOND SUNDAY AFTER EASTER

THE SHEPHERD AND THE HIRELING

Text: John 10:11-16

One of the most beautiful metaphors under which Christ represents Himself is that of a shepherd. No doubt He had often watched the good and faithful shepherds of Galilee caring for their sheep, for that country was a land of flocks and herds. In that way He saw the parallelism between a good shepherd and Himself.

Besides, He was deeply versed in the Old Testament, where He often found Jehovah compared to a shepherd. He must often have pondered such passages as these: "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: He leadeth me beside the still waters;" "He shall feed His flock like a shepherd; He shall gather the lambs with His arm and carry them in His bosom;" "Woe unto the idol shepherd that leaveth the flock!"

In the gospel for the day Christ calls Himself "the Good Shepherd." He also shows the difference between the true shepherd and the hireling. So we will follow His own order in the parable, and show, first, the character of the hireling, and, second, the character of the true shepherd.

I. The Character of the Hireling.

The hireling has no real interest in the sheep. He cares only for his pay. So when the wolf comes to forage, the hireling flees, and saves his own precious life, and leaves the sheep to their fate. "The hireling fleeth because he *is* a hireling, and careth not for the sheep," says Christ in His vivid way.

Of whom is the hireling a picture? Of the minister or layman whose sole interest in the Church and spiritual things is wrapped up in the salary he draws; who must

be paid handsomely for every service he renders; who loses his interest in the Church and her needs as soon as the money is not forthcoming. Perhaps you have known persons who sang for pay in church choirs, but as soon as the pay stopped, they were never seen again in the church service. They had no interest in worship; all they cared for was their salary. Is it any wonder that God "cannot away with" the pretense made by such singers?

There are ministers, too, here and there, who care only for the fleece and not for the sheep. As soon as they have sheared one flock, they are ready to desert it, and seek another flock that still wears its coat of wool. Such were the Pharisees whom Jesus rebuked in His day. There were also the scribes, of whom Jesus said: "Beware of the scribes, who desire to walk in long robes, and love salutations in the marketplaces, and chief seats in the synagogues, and chief places at feast; who devour widows' houses, and for a pretense make long prayers; these shall receive greater condemnation." Paul warns against men who suppose "that godliness is a way of gain" (1 Tim. 6:5). After saying that "the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil," and declaring that some "have been led astray from the faith by it," the apostle gives this admonition to Timothy: "But thou, O man of God, flee these things; and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness. Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on the life eternal, whereunto thou wast called, and didst confess the good confession in the sight of many witnesses" (1 Tim. 6:9-12). Paul also said that a bishop should be "no lover of money" (1 Tim. 4:3).

But here we will cease to criticise; nothing is easier than finding fault. We believe that there are few mere hirelings in the Church, seeking to make merchandise of the gospel. So we shall turn to the second main teaching of the text:

II. The Character of the True Shepherd.

It is much pleasanter to think about the true Shepherd, who is Jesus Himself, in whom alone we have the perfect example. He says twice in this passage, "I am the Good

Shepherd." While Jesus is the true pattern for all under-shepherds, in whatever capacity they may serve the Church, yet the main purpose of the parable is not to set before us an example, but to portray the character and love of Jesus Himself and the place He holds in the redemptive plan. There are several points worthy of consideration.

1. Twice our Lord said that the Good Shepherd *lays down His life for the sheep.* In this He proved that He was the true Shepherd. When the danger came, when the justice of God threatened, when demons and evil men sought the destruction of the flock, He did not flee away, and desert His sheep, but stood between them and peril, and Himself laid down His life and shed His blood that they might be saved.

Here we have the precious doctrine of the atonement set forth. It might be said that Christ simply put Himself in the way of the danger, while His people were permitted to escape. But that would be a very superficial interpretation of the parable. The question still would not be touched how Christ's death could effect the salvation of His people. When we remember what it was that threatened sinful men, we will readily see in what way Christ became a substitute for us. It was not only that Satan desired to compass the ruin of the flock. Of course, Satan was bent on destroying both the flock and the Shepherd; but if that had been all, Christ, who was God as well as man, could very easily have overmatched him in the contest. In that case Christ would better have lived, and put Satan to complete rout, rather than to have died on an ignominious cross. No; to overcome Satan, or merely to prove His loyalty to His vocation, is not an adequate explanation of the death of Christ. But when we remember that eternal justice had been outraged by man's sin, and, therefore, had to be satisfied and maintained, because the universe is a moral economy, then we see why the Good Shepherd took the very place of the sheep, and bore the penalty that was due them. That was what balked Satan's plan—atonement for sin was made by the divine-human Sufferer, and thereby all God's infinite attributes—love, justice, holiness, omniscience and

omnipotence—could be enlisted and combined in the overthrow of all the enemies that sought to destroy the flock.

2. Another valuable and comforting truth of this lesson is that *the Shepherd knows His sheep.* The greatest seal and assurance we have is this: "The Lord knoweth them that are His." If He did not, how easily Satan and other evil powers might compass their ruin! Here is the value of God's eternal decree, based on His eternal foreknowledge and executed by His wisdom and omnipotence. None who are truly His can ever be wrested from His all-powerful hand. He is able to keep that which they have committed to Him unto the great day.

It is a great comfort to know that the Good Shepherd knows all His sheep individually. In another verse (3) of this chapter Jesus says of the Good Shepherd: "The sheep hear his voice; and he calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out." To think that the Great Shepherd—who is also the Ruler of the universe—knows your name and mine! Is not that an inspiring thought? We may not be very proud of our names. They may not have a very euphonious sound. But when the last day shall come, and all the nations shall be gathered before the great tribunal for judgment, then, if the recording angel, reading down the long roll of the redeemed, shall at length announce your name and mine, it will be the sweetest music that ever fell upon our ears. How gladly will we then respond, "Present!"

There are some scientific men today who think that the universe is so vast, consisting of innumerable stars, planets, constellations and systems of worlds, and that the earth is so small, almost like a grain of sand on the seashore or a mote in the air, and, most of all, one person is so insignificant among all the millions of people on the earth, that God cannot know and watch over each individual, each man, woman and child. God, they say, is occupied with swinging stars and planets through the immensities; He cannot stop to take care of a poor insect of a man. Even the Psalmist felt almost daunted by this thought, for he exclaimed: "When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the

moon and the stars which thou hast ordained, what is man that thou are mindful of him, and the son of man that thou visitest him?"

But we need not trouble our faith with these reflections. God is not too busy with the immensities and eternities to notice each person, however small and inconspicuous he may be. The Good Shepherd knows His sheep by name. The God who controls perfectly all the vast universe must also know and control all its parts. If He did not know its parts perfectly, He could not control it perfectly in its entirety. Sometime one part would run out of gear, and that would hurl the whole cosmos to ruin.

Note again, God must have created the universe of matter; but matter is made up of atoms, ions and electrons; then He must have separately created each individual particle, however small. How else could it have come into existence? Yes, God must create, preserve, and therefore know each atom. He knows and cares for the infinitesimal as well as the infinite. Therefore let us rejoice in His tender and sovereign care, for if He cares for an atom, He cares for you and me. An immortal, rational soul is of infinitely more concern to Him than is an atom; yea, than are all the atoms ever created. Indeed, the atoms and all their marvelous combinations were made for man, not man for them. Rejoice, therefore, ye children of God. The Good Shepherd knoweth His sheep, and He calleth them by name. "There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over *one* sinner that repenteth." The poor penitent sinner may not be popular on earth, but *He is popular in heaven.* God and His angels watch and rejoice over him.

3. As a corollary to the blessed truth that the Good Shepherd knows His sheep, the text informs us that *His sheep also know Him.*

They recognize His voice, just as the sheep of an oriental flock know the voice of their shepherd, and respond to his call. Yes, there is something in the heart of the evangelical believer, who has been begotten by the Holy Spirit through the divine Word, that always answers to the call of the Good

Shepherd. True believers also quickly detect a false note in any calling voice. They may not always be able to tell *why* such and such a voice is not the voice of the Good Shepherd, but somehow they detect the difference. Do you ask why? Because the soul within them has been attuned to the gospel by the same Holy Spirit that inspired the gospel; therefore their heart-harp will respond only to the true sound of the gospel. Those who are truly born again cannot be deceived by the voice of a pretender.

May all of us know our Good Shepherd so well that we will also recognize His heavenly voice, and always respond to His call!

"The Lord our Shepherd is,
  He knows our every need;
And since we now are His,
  His care our souls will feed;
In vain do sin and death oppose,
For God is stronger than His foes."

XXXII

THE THIRD SUNDAY AFTER EASTER

CHRIST'S "A LITTLE WHILE"

Text: John 16:16-23

This is a beautiful and comforting gospel lesson—the one for the third Sunday after Easter. Jesus said to His disciples: "A little while, and ye shall see me no more; and again a little while, and ye shall see me."

That seems to be enigmatical language, and it sorely puzzled His disciples for the time. But that was Christ's way of speaking of the future, and it is God's way in all the prophecies of the Bible. Why? Let us see whether we cannot see a good reason, and, as Milton says, "vindicate the ways of God to man," in this respect, as well as in all others. What was His purpose, then?

I. To Protect His Redeeming Plan and Purpose.

Remember that He did not speak in an indefinite or ambiguous way about His, "A little while," for all His words are simple and His sentences perfectly clear; but He did speak in a way to excite inquiry, and put the mind on the alert, yet without absolutely setting forth the future in clear outlines. Did He have a wise pedagogical purpose in this? Surely so. Had He foretold coming events with absolute clearness, men and demons would have tried to thwart the divine purpose. They either would have frustrated His plans, or He would have had to overcome their free moral agency. So in His infinite wisdom He conserved man's freedom and also His own designs, making the one the instrument of the other. God never acts arbitrarily.

How clearly this principle is brought out in the Messianic prophecies of the Old Testament! Now that they have been so literally fulfilled, we can understand and apply them, and appreciate their great evidential value. But

how puzzling they must have been to the people who lived before the advent of the Messiah! For example, there is the prophecy that "a virgin should conceive and bear a son." How could that be? No one could understand it. But now that it has been fulfilled in the miraculous conception and virgin birth of Christ, all is perfectly clear. "And His name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The Mighty God, The Everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace" (Isa. 9:6), said the prophet in the old time; but who could interpret it then? Apply all those terms to Christ in the light of His full revelation, and how radiant they are with meaning! Even the name, "The Everlasting Father," is plain, for Christ said, "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father also," and, "I and the Father are one." There were also the prophecies in Isaiah 53 regarding His passion and death—none of them could be understood before Christ came; all of them can be understood now that He has come and fulfilled them.

But suppose they could have been perfectly interpreted prior to their fulfillment, would not demons and wicked men have tried to foil the divine purpose? God is all-wise; He knows when and how to keep His counsels; He knows how to carry out His plans without interfering with the freedom of His rational creatures. He knew how to leave Judas free, and still carry out His sovereign will and eternal decree of redemption. Let us praise Him for His omniscience, His power and His grace.

"Nature and time all open lie
To Thine immense survey,
From the formation of the sky
To the last awful day.

"Eternity, with all its years,
Stands present to Thy view;
To Thee there's nothing old appears,
To Thee there's nothing new.

"Our lives through various scenes are drawn,
And vexed with trifling cares;
While Thine eternal thoughts move on
Thine undisturbed affairs."

God also often hides His wise designs—His "little

whiles"—from men for another purpose, which we shall now consider:

II. To Discipline His People.

See the wisdom Christ showed in promising that He would depart for a little while, and then show Himself to His disciples again. He referred, no doubt, to His death and resurrection. Yet He did not make His meaning entirely plain to their comprehension. He said, though, that they would be extremely sorrowful at His departure; then He added the assurance that their "sorrow would be turned into joy." If He had made everything perfectly clear to them at that time, how could they have experienced that discipline of sorrow? They needed that. The sequel shows how wisely Jesus dealt with His beloved disciples. Without that discipline of sorrow and disappointment, subsequently turned into joy, they would not have been as brave and strong as they should have been, to become the world-wide heralds of the good news, in the midst of bitter prosecution.

How radiant these prophecies appear in the light of what followed! When the disciples saw their Master perishing on the cross, they were exceedingly sorrowful. All their hopes were blasted. Peter became so disheartened that he said, "I go a-fishing!" But now note, when Jesus appeared to His disciples in His resurrection body, their sorrow was turned into joy. "Then were the disciples glad when they saw the Lord." They received such an uplift, and their waning faith was so revived, that they never again lost courage, but became the world's greatest heroes, and proclaimed Christ and His resurrection and Messiahship wherever they went, in the face of the bitterest persecution.

When Christ uttered His strange prophecy, the disciples were utterly nonplussed; but when the prophecies were so literally and wonderfully fulfilled by the Lord's resurrection and the outpouring the Holy Spirit on Pentecost—ah, then they understood! How their hearts must have leaped with joy, as they exclaimed to one another: "We see now just what the Lord meant by saying, 'A little while!' "

Oh, the wonderful "little whiles" of the Christ! How fraught they are with meaning! We may depend upon it that every time our Master says to us in our hard experiences, "I will see you again in a little while," He will fulfill His promise to the letter—but in the most unexpected way. It will, however, be the best way. With us sometimes the Lord's "a little while" may seem to be a long while, but when the blessed fulfillment comes, whether in time or eternity, the period of trial will seem, after all, to be only " a little while." "For our light affliction, which is but for the time being, worketh for us a for more exceeding and eternal weight of glory."

"How happy are the saints above,
Who once went sorrowing here!
But now they taste unmingled love,
And joys without a tear."

XXXIII

THE FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER EASTER

GOING AWAY AND SENDING THE SPIRIT

Text: John 16:5-15

Our lesson for today teaches us some very important doctrines and practical truths. Some things in it have often been misunderstood. In order to get the most help from the text, let us ask a few questions, and answer them as best we can.

I. What is Meant by Christ's "Going Away"?

The importance of the question will appear if we ask another question: Does not Christ often promise us His own personal presence? In one place He says: "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world." At another place He says of the Father and Himself: "We will come unto Him, and make our *abode* with him." Still elsewhere He gives this assurance: "I will not leave you comfortless; I will come to you." And again: "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." Paul also says: "Christ in you, the hope of glory," and, "I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me." And yet, in apparent opposition to all these passages, Christ speaks in the text and in other places about "going away" and "departing," and about "sending another Comforter."

Is the teaching of the Bible full of confusion, of contradictory statements? No, it is not! It is a beautiful and logical unity, if we will only collate its whole teaching and penetrate into its deep inner meaning. There is a sense in which Christ *went away,* and yet another sense in which He is *personally present* with every one of us. We must not think He means that the Holy Spirit came to take His place, so that Christ is present only by proxy; that He is absent somewhere in heaven, while the Holy Spirit mediates His

presence here on earth and in His substitute. Many people seem to think in that way, but it is not good theology nor correct Biblical interpretation. The passages we have quoted, and others that might be given, teach plainly that Christ is personally present everywhere with His people. He also taught no less explicitly that the Holy Spirit is personally present with us, for He said of the Spirit: "He shall abide with you forever." Christ also taught, with the same positiveness, that the Father is present (John 14:23). Thus all three persons of the blessed Trinity are present with us, each performing His proper function. We are not poor; we are rich indeed; we are the heirs of the Triune God!

But what is meant by Christ's "going away"? Let us explain: When the Son of God became incarnate, He—that is, His person or *Ego*—came out of the transcendent and infinite realm down here into the realm of time and space, as John 1:14 teaches: "And the Word became flesh, and tabernacled among us." He assumed human nature, and lived here for thirty-three years in the state of humiliation. "He humbled Himself, and made Himself of no reputation, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross" (Phil. 2:5-8).

But now observe: when His atoning work was accomplished (He said on the cross, "It is finished"), He ascended again to the right hand of the Majesty on high, taking His human nature with Him and glorifying it with all the fulness of the Godhead. That is, He "went away" or "departed" from the realm of time and space, and ascended to the realm of Infinity and Eternity where He was before, as He taught in John 17:1-5. Now, so far as time and space are concerned, there are always a "coming," a "going" and a "sending." That which is under these limitations *comes* and *goes*. In time and space there is always a *movement*. But when Christ went into the transcendent realm and was completely glorified with the infinite God, He became ubiquitous or omnipresent, as the Infinite One Himself is and must be. Whatever is transcendent must also be immanent—that is, whatever is greater than time and space

must fill and pervade time and space. Thus you see that Christ "went away" to be glorified that He might be present with us in another way, the divine, ubiquitous way, in all His power and grace and in His whole divine-human person. While He was here under limitation (of course, by His own will and condescending love), He could be present only at one place at a time; but now that He is transcendent, He is everywhere present. That is precisely the teaching of Paul (Eph. 4:10): "He that descended is the same also that *ascended far above all heavens that He might fill all things.*" And this agrees with Christ's own wonderful promise: "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world."

Here we have established the precious doctrine and fact of Christ's *real presence.* It is Christ who is present with us—the Incarnate Son of God, not merely His divinity. If only His Deity were present, that would not be Christ, it would be only the Logos, the same as He was before the incarnation; but it is Jesus Himself who is with us, the divine-human Redeemer who lived on earth and died on the cross; only now in glorified form, clothed with all authority both in heaven and on earth. Dear friends, do not think of Christ as only up yonder in heaven; true, He *is* there; but He is also *here* and *everywhere,* shedding His Spirit upon us, and comforting us in our sorrows because He also had sorrow and temptation (Heb. 4:15). And when you come to the Holy Communion, remember that, since Christ in His whole divine-human person is everywhere present, it is very easy for Him to impart His glorified body and blood to you as the pledge of the forgiveness of your sins. It means that Christ is fully present, and holds personal communion with you.*

But having spent so much time on our first question, we must treat the rest of the text more briefly.

II. Why Did Jesus Have to Go Away Before He Would Send the Holy Spirit?

Observe that He says: "It is expedient for you that I

*In order to prove that this is the true Lutheran doctrine of the real presence and of the Lord's Supper, we refer the reader to the Formula of Concord (Jacob's edition of "The Book of Concord"), pages 518 (sections 10, 11, 12), 629, 630.

go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come; but if I depart, I will send Him unto you." In their sorrow over His prospective departure, He assures them that it was best for them that He go away. Why must He ascend to the right hand of God before the Spirit would come?

It is not so difficult to understand. Had He sent the Holy Spirit while He was still in the state of humiliation, the Spirit would have brought only a meager blessing and baptism; no more, at least, than the visitation of the Spirit in the Old Testament dispensation; but after He was highly exalteth, and fully glorified with all His original and eternal divine glory, His human nature partaking, then He would pour out the Holy Spirit in all the plenitude of His power; then the Holy Spirit would take of the things of the exalted Christ, and would shed them upon His Church. That is the meaning of Pentecost and its great baptism of fire. It was not then the poor Suffering Servant of Jehovah who was blessing His disciples and Church; no! it was the Christ who had received "all authority both in heaven and on earth."

Is it not a beautiful doctrine, so consistent and rational, and so rich for Christian experience? True, indeed, is the apostle's teaching (1 Cor. 2:9, 10): "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things that God hath prepared for them that love Him. But God hath revealed them unto us by His Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God." How wonderful, how consistent, how exhilarating is the teaching of God's Word!

III. What are the Offices of the Holy Spirit?

We know how beautifully they are set forth in the catechism: "to call, to enlighten, to sanctify, and to preserve us in the true faith." But here we will follow our text.

1. *He will reprove.*

"He will reprove the world of sin," says Christ, "because they believe not on me." And why? Because, since Christ is the only means of salvation from sin, to reject

Christ is the crowning sin of the world. "He that believeth on the Son hath eternal life; he that believeth not on the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on Him" (John 3:36).

He shall also reprove the world "of righteousness, because I go to the Father, and ye see me no more." The Revised Version makes the passage plainer: "He shall *convict* the world in respect to righteousness." This, no doubt, means that, when Christ has gone back into the invisible realm, the world will grow bolder, and will persecute His disciples and commit all kinds of wickedness; but the Holy Spirit will convict them all the more, and reveal all the more the heinousness of their sins, because they reject Him, the Holy Spirit, as well as the ascended Christ.

The Holy Ghost will also convict the world "in respect to judgment, because the prince of this world is judged." The "prince of this world is Satan," and when the Holy Spirit shall judge him, the people of the world who follow him will also be judged. Thus if we would escape the judgment that will come upon Satan, we must renounce his leadership.

2. *The Holy Spirit will guide into all truth.*

The reason He will do this is that He regenerates the heart and enlightens the mind, so that men can understand spiritual things. How dark were the minds of the apostles before Pentecost! But how clearly they understood the things of Christ then! That is Christ's meaning when He says in the text: "I have many things to say unto you, but ye cannot hear them now;" then He adds: "Howbeit, when He, the Spirit of truth shall come, He shall guide you into all truth." With this agrees what Christ said elsewhere: "That which is born of the flesh is flesh; that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." And the apostle: "Spiritual things are spiritually discerned." Many people stumble over the Bible, because they are unspiritual, while it is a spiritual book.

Another reason why the Spirit guides into truth is that He speaks what He hears, and takes the things of

Christ, which are also the things of the Father (verse 15), and shows them to us. The Holy Spirit does not speak from Himself, for He is only one person of the Godhead, but He speaks from the fulness of the whole blessed Trinity and from the fulness of the glorified Christ; therefore He is able to guide into all truth. How meager is the spiritual wisdom of mere human reason in comparison with that of the Holy Ghost who searches the deep things of God!—The Holy Spirit, according to the text, performs another well-defined function:

3. *He glorifies Christ.*

He does not glorify Himself, for He works inwardly, invisibly, in the heart; but He glorifies Christ because He receives of Christ's fulness, and manifests it to His people. How well this agrees with Christian experience! Whenever a person is converted by the Holy Spirit, he gives the praise and the glory to Christ. He ascribes worship to Him as the divine Saviour. He attributes no merit to man or his work. He knows that he has been saved by divine grace bestowed through Jesus Christ. Therefore the rationalist, who robs Christ of His divinity and glory, proves by that very token that He has not been truly converted, enlightened and guided by the Holy Spirit. It would hardly be consistent for him to join in the hymn:

"Come Holy Spirit, Heavenly Dove,
With all thy quickening powers;
Come, shed abroad a Saviour's love,
And that shall kindle ours."

XXXIV

THE FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER EASTER

"IN THAT DAY"

Text: John 16:23-30

In our lesson for today the phrase, "in that day," or its equivalent, is used a number of times. No doubt the phrase refers to the day of Pentecost, when Christ gave to His disciples the complete spiritual revelation and insight which they needed, and which cured them of all their doubt and hesitancy. Let us note some of the things which were to occur "in that day."

I. Learning to Pray "In That Day."

First Jesus says, "In that day ye shall ask nothing of Me. Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in My name He will give you." What is the meaning of this? Is it a contradiction? Not at all. It is a rubric on the method of true prayer in the dispensation of the Holy Spirit. Before this the disciples had been going directly to Christ with their questions because He was with them in fleshly form. They had been depending on Him as if He were a mere teacher or prophet, though a very wise one. They had not realized His oneness with the Father (John 14:8) and so had not recognized His true Godhead. But "in that day," the day when He would pour out His Spirit upon them, they would know and experience His oneness with the Father, and therefore their prayers would be offered to the Father in the name of the Son, always recognizing the latter's divinity as well as His humanity.

May we not say that here we have a very profound teaching as to the proper form and spirit of Christian prayer. It should never be directed merely to Jesus as if He were only a man or a human prophet, for that would be idolatry. If Christ had not cautioned His disciples in

this way, they might have prayed to Him as if He were a kind of demi-god, or as some people today pray to the Virgin Mary or to the saints. They might have regarded Him as the Arians afterwards did—as a created being, but not as true God. Therefore He was careful to instruct them to offer their petitions to the Father in His name, so that they would always identify the Father and the Son as one in essence, and not regard them as two gods, or look upon the one as subordinate to or independent of the other. This agrees with His teaching when He said, "I and the Father are one."

Ought we never, then, to offer our prayers directly to Jesus? Never unless in our thought we pray to Him in full recognition of His perfect Godhood and complete identity in essence with the other persons of the Holy Trinity. According to this teaching, the model form of prayer would be that which is addressed to the Father in the name of Christ. When this is meant, even though not expressed in that particular form, God understands its intent, and of course hears and answers. Yet, as Christ is the one and only Mediator between the Father and man, the perfect Christian prayer is the one that is directed to the Father in the name of the Son. This is the meaning of the added verse (24): "Hitherto have ye asked nothing in My name: ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full."

II. Interpreting Christ's Word "In That Day."

There is something beautiful and profound in verse 25: "These things have I spoken to you in allegories: the hour cometh when I shall no more speak unto you in allegories, but shall tell you plainly of the Father." The phrase, "the hour cometh" means the same as "in that day." We do not think the translation, "dark sayings," a good one. The Greek word (*paroimiai*) means parables or allegories. These are not necessarily "dark sayings," but they need interpretation, and thus there is always danger that the wrong meaning may be drawn from them. For this reason Christ sometimes gave the interpretation of His parables,

so that His disciples might better understand their application. However, "in that day"—the day of the Holy Spirit's visitation—the disciples would understand clearly, directly and literally that Christ came out from the Father and that He was one with Him in the unity of essence and love.

It is interesting to notice how much theology the apostles learned through the baptism of the Spirit. "That day" was a great teacher to them, a great time of revelation and spiritual insight. They soon learned the holy doctrines of Christology and Soteriology—the doctrines of the person and work of Christ. They proclaimed that Christ was the Son of God, and therefore divine; that He made vicarious atonement for sin by His death on the cross; that He rose from the dead to prove His Messiahship and to be a living, ever-present and all-powerful Saviour; and that He was glorified at the right hand of God, so that He could pour out the Holy Spirit upon His people from all the fulness of His glorified Person. Yes, there is no better teacher of theology than the Holy Spirit; no better interpreter of the sayings of Christ and the doctrines of His Word. No one who is baptized by the Holy Spirit will despise theology.

III. Christ's Intercession "In That Day."

"In that day" occurs again in verse 26, and that and the succeeding verses are full of deep divine meanings. Here He again encouraged prayer in His name, but He added what at first may seem a strange statement: "And I say not unto you that I will pray the Father for you, for the Father Himself loveth you," etc. Is not this statement in opposition to Christ's intercessory prayer in the next chapter and to the doctrine of His intercession at God's right hand? Not in the least when we understand our Lord's full and profound spiritual teaching. Remember the preceding part of the verse says, "In that day ye shall ask in my name." That is, when the Holy Spirit teaches you the true doctrine and spirit of prayer, and you fully accept me as the only Mediator and as one with the Father, then

you will be brought into perfect harmony with the plan of redemption, and thus will be completely reconciled with the Father, and so there will then be no need for me to continue to plead with Him for you. The reason is clearly given in the next statement: "For the Father Himself loveth you." Why? "Because ye have loved Me, and have believed that I came out from the Father." There was no need to make request of the Father that His disciples should be reconciled to God; for, as they had accepted Christ, they were already reconciled, and were embraced in His saving and redeeming love. He might continue to intercede for them to be *kept* in the faith, according to John 17:9 and 15, but it would be "vain repetition" to pray for them to be saved and reconciled after they had accepted Christ and were praying in His name. There is even a divine economy in Christ's intercession for men.

All we need to do is to study Christ's profound spiritual teaching in its fulness, reality and depth, to see how beautifully harmonious it is.

IV. Peace, Good Cheer and Victory "In That Day."

It is wonderful how much emphasis Jesus put upon "that day;" indeed, He seemed to be almost jealous of "that day." He seemed to discourge any over-confidence before "that day," as if it were ill-considered and premature. Every time the disciples boasted of any knowledge or stability, He curbed them, and warned them that they would fail. When Peter vaunted himself, and declared that, though all men forsook Him, he never would, Christ rebuked his boastfulness, and told him he would deny Him thrice.

So here we have an incident of the same kind. His disciples said: "Lo, now speakest thou plainly, and speakest no proverb (or parable). Now we are sure that thou knowest all things, and needest not that any man should ask thee: by this we believe that thou camest forth from God."

Was not that a noble confession? Was it not exactly in accord with what He had said a little while before, when He told them that the time would come when He would no

longer speak to them in proverbs, but would show them plainly of the Father? Yet He dampened their ardent spirits by saying: "Do ye now believe? Behold, the hour cometh, yea, is now come, that ye shall be scattered, every one to his own, and shall leave me alone."

What is the meaning of all this apparent fencing? Some men, especially the liberal critics, simply decide offhand that there is no logical connection, but that in some way Christ's partially remembered sayings were jumbled together here by the apostles without relevancy. But that is a superficial way of regarding God's Word, as the liberalist's way usually is. Let us see whether we cannot get the inner meaning and logical connection in this dialogue between the Master and His disciples.

Christ had been saying "in that day" or "the time cometh," referring to the enlightenment by the Holy Spirit at and after Pentecost, when, not in their own wisdom, but by divine enduement, they would be able to pray aright and understand His teaching. But at once His disciples became presuming, as men are prone to be in every age and in every place. They thought they understood Christ then and there, in their own wisdom, and without waiting for the illumination of the Holy Spirit; so they said (verse 29, 30): "Lo, now speakest thou plainly, and speakest no proverb. Now we are sure that thou," etc. You see, they were premature and unspiritual in their claim to understand. Therefore Christ rebuked them (verse 31, 32), and told them that the time would come very soon when they, spite of their boasting, would be scattered and would leave Him alone. They were not willing to wait until "that day," until they were endued and enlightened by heavenly wisdom. How truly was Christ's promise fulfilled! Only a few days afterward "they all forsook Him and fled," and one of them betrayed and another denied Him. What a rebuke was that of all vain, boastful, worldly wisdom! In every age men have found that the unregenerate reason leads to error and rationalism, and "the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him:

neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned."

Afterward the disciples obeyed Christ when He commanded them to tarry in Jerusalem, and wait for the promise of the Father which they had heard of Him. "For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence" (Acts 1:4, 5). He also said (verse 8): "But ye shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me," etc. And we know full well, in the light of history, that, when "that day" came, they understood their Master's parables, and were clothed with spiritual efficiency. Even on one day—the day of Pentecost—three thousand persons were converted, and after that there were "daily added to the Church such as were being saved."

Now we are able to comprehend and apply what Jesus said in the last two verses of our gospel for today. After saying that His disciples would be scattered and would leave Him alone, he added: "And yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me." He meant by that that He alone, by the sustaining power of the Father, must make atonement for the sins of the world; no human being could help Him. He must "tread the wine-press of wrath alone."

And then He adds a significant statement: "These things have I spoken unto you that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world."

Are these more enigmas? Not at all, when we interpret the statements in the light of "that day." When the Holy Spirit enlightened them, they remembered Christ's words, as He promised (John 14:26), and then they had peace in Him; then, too, they could bear their tribulations, and be of good cheer, for they knew that, by His atoning death and His victorious resurrection and ascension, He had "overcome the world."

We, today, are living in "that day"—the dispensation of the Spirit. May He so enlighten and empower us that we shall understand Christ's teachings and bear unequivocal witness to His truth!

XXXV

ASCENSION DAY

THE ASCENDED LORD AT WORK

Text: Mark 16:14-20

Time has brought us again to Ascension Day. It is not an unimportant day in the Christian Calendar. The ascension of our Lord to the right hand of God was a necessary event in the plan of saving grace; it was an essential link in the golden chain rebinding heaven and earth. In the course of our reflections this morning we shall try to set forth its significance in God's redemptive purpose. There are several truths in the text that lead up to this main thought, and these we must speak of first.

It is strange how full of skepticism the apostles were. Therefore it became necessary for Jesus to rebuke them.

I. Jesus Upbraided His Disciples.

This was on account of their "unbelief and hardness of heart." He had wrought many wonderful works before their eyes; He had given them most wonderful teaching; His life had been pure and good, so that they had every reason to believe in His integrity; and He had also told them plainly that He would rise from the dead on the third day. Yet when the women and others came and reported that they had seen Him alive, the eleven apostles could not believe their testimony. It would seem that His cruel and ignominious death on the cross had given so great a shock to their faith and hope that they could not be revived. So they had to be aroused by His stern upbraiding.

While their lack of faith is not to be excused, yet, in the providence of God, it has been turned to good service. Sometimes unbelievers assert that the disciples were a credulous company, ready to believe anything. But the gospel history proves the direct opposite. They were slow to be-

lieve and hard to convince. So much so that Jesus had to censure them severely. They must, therefore, have had indubitable proof of Christ's resurrection to overcome their unbelief, and convert them into bold preachers, willing even to die for their faith. Thus their very unfaith becomes a strong weapon for defending the gospel.

Some skeptics have held that the disciples were fondly expecting the resurrection of Christ; therefore their imaginations were fired, so that they thought they saw Him alive, when they really did not. But the gospel history teaches the direct opposite. They had practically given up all hope. Peter even said, "I go a-fishing;" as much as to say, "We followed Jesus in vain; we were mistaken and deluded; so I am going back to my old trade. I can make a living at that, anyway."

Now, what brought these men out of their faithless and hopeless state of mind, and made them heroic preachers of Christ and the resurrection? Nothing but absolutely convincing evidence that their Master had come back from the dead. Thus, in theological language, we say that the doubts of the disciples are of great apologetic value. They may be turned into a proof of the Christian religion.

But now we come to a remarkable and sudden change in Christ's tone. In spite of their weakness and unbelief—

II. Jesus Gives His Disciples Their Great Commission.

One moment He upbraids them for their unbelief and hard-heartedness; the next He entrusts them with the greatest commission ever put into the hands of mortal men. If that is not an evidence of divine foreknowledge and power, we do not know where such evidence can be found. Here were these poor, disheartened disciples, weak in faith, with little learning and no prestige or wealth, so hopeless that Jesus Himself had just upbraided them; yet the next moment He bids these very men to "go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation!" To make the case still stronger, they were to preach that the man who had

been crucified a few weeks prior, had risen from the dead and was the Redeemer of the world! From a worldly point of view there never was a forlorner hope. What could give success to such a movement? Nothing but divine power. Then Jesus must have known that He would endue His disciples with such power, and that they and their successors would be able to carry forward His world-wide commission to victorious achievement.

And the great fact is, they *did* succeed. In three centuries Christ captured the proud, idolatrous, world-dominating Roman empire, and in all succeeding centuries, until the present day, He has gone forward conquering and to conquer. Today Christianity is the greatest moral and spiritual force in the world.

How shall we account for these marvelous achievances? We know that every effect must have an adequate cause. That is the fundamental principle of causality which the universal human mind intuitively recognizes. But that little band of daunted and unlearned disciples were certainly far from being an adequate cause for the triumph and success of Christ's commission. The only adequate cause that can be assigned is that given in the Holy Scriptures, namely, that the disciples and the Church they founded were endued with the power of the Holy Spirit, which is the power of God.

The latter part of our text also teaches this fact, only it puts it in a different form: "And they went forth, and preached everywhere, *the Lord working with them,* and confirming the Word with signs following." That explains it all. Their ascended Lord, now clothed with all might and authority, *was at work with His Church,* giving them the needed efficiency. Paul explains it too: "Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to account anything as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is from God, who also made us sufficient as ministers of a new covenant" (2 Cor. 3:5). And again he says: "But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the exceeding greatness of the power may be of God, and not from ourselves" (2 Cor. 4:7). Just so the

apostle explains in another place (1 Cor. 1:27-31): "But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world, that He might put to shame them that are wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world, that He might put to shame the things that are strong," etc. All of this teaching agrees precisely with the promises of Christ (Matt. 28:20): "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world," and (Acts 1:8): "Ye shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be my witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and unto the uttermost parts of the earth." Yes! let us take the explications of the Word of God, and we shall find an adequate cause for the influence of Christ and His religion in the world. "The Lord working with them"—that accounts for all. When Christ ascended to the right hand of God, He did not become an idler; for, clothed with all divine power, He wrought mightily with His people. It is He, the living, exalted Christ, who is our strength and shield today.

III. Jesus Makes His Disciples' Preaching Decisive of Human Destiny.

In charging the disciples with His world-embracing commission, Jesus virtually put the keys of the kingdom of heaven into their hands; for, after saying, "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation," He added these remarkable words: "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be condemned." Was not that entrusting those poor disciples with a tremendous responsibility? But He did it, and the results prove that He did not misjudge their power. He endued them with the Holy Spirit, who inspired them infallibly in preaching the gospel and in writing the New Testament.

Remember, however, that they were to preach "the gospel;" not their own wisdom or speculations or devices; and when they did that, their word was to be received as the Word of God, and therefore would decide human destiny. As the means of grace, everything depends on the gospel; as the human condition, everything depends on faith. God

has foreordained that plan, and it is the righteous one, the ethical one. Is it not true that the gospel divides men for time and eternity into two classes? Said Jesus at another time: "He that believeth on Him (the Son of God) is not condemned; he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed on the name of the only begotten Son of God" (John 3:18). Listen to Paul teaching the same doctrine: "For the word of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us who are saved it is the power of God" (1 Cor. 1:18). And note again: "For we are a sweet savor of Christ unto God, in them that are saved and in them that perish; to the one a savor of death unto death; to the other a savor of life unto life." Thus the whole Bible teaches one and the same doctrine respecting the power of the keys. Oh, the beautiful unity of Biblical teaching!

"A glory gilds the Sacred Page,
Majestic like the sun;
It gives a light to every age;
It gives, but borrows none."

IV. Jesus Ascends to the Right Hand of God.

This is the great thought of Ascension Day. Let us note its sacred meaning. During the time of His humiliation the divine Son of God had voluntarily and condescendingly put human limitations upon Himself, and had placed Himself under the limitations of time and space. The Scriptures are filled with this precious doctrine. "And the Word *became* flesh, and dwelt among us;" "God so loved the world that He *gave* His only-begotten Son;" "The Father *sent* the Son into the world;" "I speak not from myself;" "My doctrine is not mine, but His that sent me;" "The Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He seeth the Father do;" "The Father is greater than I;" "Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass; nevertheless, not my will, but thine be done;" "And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self, with the glory which I had with thee before the world was." The apostolic doctrine is the same (Phil. 2:5-8): "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus; who, existing in the form of God, counted not being

on an equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, becoming obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." The *Te Deum* expresses the same thought: "Thou didst humble thyself to be born of a virgin." Yes, "though He was rich, yet for our sakes He became poor, that we through His poverty might be made rich."

It was for our sakes and our salvation that He thus emptied and humbled Himself. He did it that He might be one of us, our Elder Brother, our sympathizing Friend and Companion, tasting all our joys and sorrow; also that He might, as the divine-human Saviour, keep the law for us and suffer its penalty on the cross in our stead. Of course, it was not the divine nature that was put under kenosis, for that the Son had in common with the Father and the Spirit; but it was the Person or Ego of the Son, which He had in distinction from the other Persons of the Trinity.

Now, it is evident that in this state of voluntary humiliation, He did not exercise all His divine powers: for the time being He had relinquished the exercise of them, so that He might tabernacle with man as man, and suffer and die for him. But having accomplished His atoning work, He must once more resume the exercise of His divine power, majesty and glory in order to be our omnipotent Saviour. He must "ascend far above all heavens that He might fill all things." He must become transcendent that He might become immanent—that is, everywhere present in time and space; so that He could fulfill His gracious promise: "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world." And this must be true of His human nature as well as of His divine Person, or else it would not be Christ, but only His Deity, who would be present with us. According to His human nature, Christ had to ascend to heaven and be glorified before He could be ubiquitous. Since He is filled with all the fulness of God, He is everywhere as our divine-human Comrade and Friend as well as our Redeemer.

Moreover, He had to ascend and be glorified in order that the baptism by the Holy Spirit might be divinely efficacious. Had the Spirit come only from Him in His state of humiliation, His power would have been greatly limited; but after He had ascended to God's right hand and received all the fulness of God, His human nature partaking, then, when He poured the Spirit upon His Church, He came with all the plenitude of divine power and efficacy. He took the things of Christ and brought them to His Church. Just as Jesus promised (John 16:14, 15) relative to the Holy Spirit: "He shall glorify me: for He shall take of mine, and shall declare it unto you. All things whatsoever the Father hath are mine: therefore said I, He taketh of mine, and shall declare it unto you." You see, having been glorified with all the fulness of God, Christ could send forth the Holy Spirit charged and potentialized with all that fulness. Hence His promise: "Ye shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you." That is the reason three thousand persons were converted and baptized under the preaching of Peter on the day of Pentecost.

So we see that the ascension of Christ was really the crowning of His saving work. It clothed Him with Sovereign power and kingly glory. Is not Ascension Day an important day in the Church Year? Is it not worth while to celebrate it by coming together in God's house to worship Him?

"Hail the day that sees Him rise
To His throne above the skies!
Christ, the Lamb for sinners given,
Enters now the highest heaven.
There for Him high triumph waits;
Lift your heads, eternal gates!
Wide unfold the radiant scene;
Take the King of glory in!

"Lo! the heaven its Lord receives;
Yet He loves the earth He leaves;
Though returning to His throne,
Still He calls mankind His own.
See, He lifts His hands above!
See, He shows the prints of love!
Hark, His gracious lips bestow
Blessings on His Church below!"

XXXVI

SUNDAY AFTER ASCENSION

THE OFFICE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Text: John 15:26–16:4

Those persons who think that the Lutheran Church neglects the doctrine and function of the Holy Spirit are surely not familiar with the lessons of the Christian Year which are used so largely by our ministers. Between the resurrection and Pentecost all our gospels deal with the Holy Spirit, as does also the lesson for Sunday after the ascension. We have a fundamental lesson on the witness of the Spirit.

How deeply spiritual is our Lord's teaching here! It requires the spiritual mind to interpret it with any degree of adequacy. This is perhaps the reason for so much merely naturalistic teaching regarding the Bible today—the lack of the spiritual mind. In this lesson Christ says: "But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, who proceedeth from the Father, He shall bear witness of Me." What does such language plainly teach?

I. The Holy Spirit is a Person.

Every expression in this sentence connotes personality. "When the Comforter is come"—implying freedom of action, not merely coerced action. Also, "who proceedeth from the Father"—indicating the Spirit's own personal action, not mere mechanical motion. "He shall bear witness of Me." How could a mere divine power, as Sabellians have taught in the past and teach today, bear such witness? The very phraseology employed connotes that the Spirit is a person, one who can bear testimony in the hearts of believers, and bear such testimony as He chooses. He is also called the Paraclete, which means an advocate or helper, and these

terms also carry the idea of intelligence and freedom, and hence of personality.

It behooves us today to stand firmly for the blessed doctrine of the Holy Trinity, of which the Holy Spirit is the Third Person. We need a person to bear clear testimony in our hearts that Christ is the Saviour, that our sins are forgiven through faith in Him, and that we are the children of God. A mere *power* from God, as the Sabellians teach, would not bear a distinct and positive testimony with our spirits. We want nothing obscure and ambiguous in Christian experience. The Holy Spirit, being a person of the Godhead, tells us clearly that we are God's children through redemption and by regeneration.

II. He is the Spirit of Truth.

The believer's heart is made to rejoice that Christ calls the Holy Spirit the "Spirit of truth." That is just what the real Christian wants—truth. He desires comfort and joy, if it is God's will; but, first of all, he wants truth. He wants no comfort, peace or joy that is based on falsehood. It is the assurance of truth only that can give true and lasting experience. Believers want no false hopes and comforts foisted upon them. Better sorrow and heaviness of heart than error. Hence it is that Christ first of all gives assurances of truth. He says: "I am the way, the life and the truth;" "Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free;" "I will send you the Spirit of truth." So when the Holy Spirit comes into one's consciousness, and impinges His evidence there, the initial impression He makes is that His witness is of the truth. Then the believer knows that He stands on the rock of truth. When he has the truth, he has everything that is needed, for that is the foundation on which all else in the Christian system and in Christian experience is built. No; in spite of all the taunts of the worldly wise and the rationalistic, the evangelical believer has knowledge of truth first of all in his experience, which is wrought within him by the Spirit of truth proceeding from the Father and the Son.

Let no one imagine that a Christian experience, wrought by the Holy Spirit through the Word of God, is a mere conviction of the head, or a delusion of the imagination, or a subjective impression of the heart. No! no! it is an absolute assurance of the truth impinged upon the consciousness. No other experience is clearer, surer, more distinct, or more precious.

III. He is a Witnessing Spirit.

The peculiar subject of the Spirit's witness is vital. The text says: "He shall bear witness of Me"—that is of Christ. This is very precious. The Holy Spirit does not primarily bear witness of Himself. He is the most inner, psychical, and therefore inconspicuous person of the Godhead. While He has an objective existence, just as the Father and the Son have, His work is mostly subjective—that is, in the innermost consciousness of believers. He does not glorify Himself; He glorifies Christ, and bears testimony to Christ's person and work in the plan of redeeming grace. Hence the person of the Holy Spirit does not come out so conspicuously in the representations of the Scriptures, nor are there many passages which clearly teach that He is to be worshipped and supplicated. He does not bear witness of Himself, but of Christ.

Does this doctrine agree with Christian experience? It does. Note the worship of the newly converted person: he does not give much praise to the Holy Spirit, but he does glorify Christ; he dwells lovingly and gratefully on what Jesus has done for him both in His life and in His atoning death. Afterward he will get clearer ideas of the Holy Spirit's office and personality; but that will be more discursive, and not the first spontaneous assurance that comes in a Christian experience.

IV. He Causes Believers to Bear Witness.

The testimony of the Holy Spirit within the believer will have its natural effect: it will lead him to bear witness in the world. "With the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salva-

tion." Out of the fulness of the heart the mouth speaketh. The Spirit-born Christian will not keep silent. He will not be a dumb man. He will confess Christ before men. He will want others to know the truth and have a share in the joy. Nothing is more unselfish than Christian assurance. To share it with others will not lessen its amount, clearness and preciousness, but rather will heighten all these qualities. The gospel has been disseminated by testimony from the beginning, and thus it goes from person to person, from generation to generation, from age to age, bringing all believers into the apostolic succession, and making them all spiritual kin.

Paul looked upon Timothy as his spiritual son. He said he had begotten him in the Lord. It was because Timothy had been brought to Christ through Paul's preaching and teaching. It is a blessed way of propagating the gospel—through testimony. In heaven we shall no doubt find great joy in tracing all the various threads of influence by which we have been helped by one another. And such holy testimony never ends, but like a ripple in the sea, it spreads farther and farther till it reaches the remotest shore. That is what the Bible means when it says of righteous Abel, "He, being dead, yet speaketh." The angel also told John, the revelator, to write: "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from henceforth; yea, that they may rest from their labors; and their works do follow them."

May we all bear such testimony to Christ with our lives and lips that the same may be said of us after we have been called from time into eternity!

"So let our lips and lives express
The holy gospel we profess;
So let our works and virtues shine,
To prove the doctrine all divine.

"Thus shall we best proclaim abroad
The honors of our Saviour God,
When the salvation reigns within,
And grace subdues the power of sin."

V. He is a Sustaining Spirit.

In the remaining verses of the text (16:1-4) Jesus tells

His disciples of the trials that should come upon them. Their opponents would disgrace them by putting them out of the synagogues, and some of them they would slay, thinking they were doing God's service. "And these things will they do unto you, because they have not known the Father nor Me," Jesus adds. But He tells them not to stumble or be offended, but remember what He had told them. He had not told them about these trials before, because He was with them, and could keep them encouraged. But now He would depart, and so He tells them about the Spirit, the Comforter, who would sustain them in all their trials. He would reprove the world of sin, of righteousness and of judgment; but the disciples He would "guide into all truth."

Thus it is that the Holy Spirit is the Comforter in all sorrow. He always bears witness in our hearts of the veracity, nearness, power and saving grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. Let us not be afraid of the Holy Ghost. He is no apparition, but a loving, consoling, sustaining personality, who will abide with us forever; so that we can sing joyfully:

"Come, Holy Comforter,
Thy sacred witness bear
In this glad hour;
Thou, who almighty art,
Now rule in every heart,
And ne'er from us depart,
Spirit of power."

XXXVII

WHITSUNDAY OR PENTECOST

CHRIST AND THE COMFORTER

Text: John 14:23-31

The gospel for Whitsunday or Pentecost agrees entirely with the lesson from the Acts (2:1-13), which contains the account of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. At the same time the gospel complements the story in Acts by adding some needed data. Here are some very comforting and stimulating doctrines.

I. The Real Presence of Christ and the Holy Spirit.

The gospel teaches that the presence of the Holy Spirit does not exclude the real presence of Christ Himself. Let us see how this is.

In verse 23 of the gospel Jesus said: "If a man love me, he will keep my word; and my Father will love him, and *we* will come unto him, and make our abode with him." This shows that both the Father and the Son will dwell with the true disciple. The word for "abode" does not mean a transient visit, but a continual presence. With this agrees verse 28: "Ye have heard how I said to you, I go away, and I come unto you." Other gospel testimony corroborates this teaching, especially where Christ says: "And lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world."

Now collate with this what Peter said on the day of Pentecost as recorded in Acts 2:23: "Being therefore by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, *He* (Christ) hath poured forth this which ye see and hear." That is (Eph. 4-10), having "ascended far above all heavens that He might fill all things," the glorified Christ is present everywhere, and therefore was present on the day of Pentecost

to baptize the Church directly with the Holy Spirit whom He had promised to His followers. It makes the doctrine and the experience all the more precious to know that Christ Himself is really present with His people, bestowing directly upon them the Holy Spirit. It is so much better than to think of Christ as far away, making the Holy Spirit, as it were, His deputy.

II. The Holy Spirit's Guidance.

Next we note Christ's promise of what the Comforter will do for His apostles when He shall come in the fulness of His redemptive and revealing power and grace: "He shall teach you all things." The Comforter would lead the apostles into all truth—into further truth than even Christ had brought them. There are liberalists today who cry, "Back to Christ," meaning thereby that we cannot trust the testimony of the apostles, but must accept only what is attributed to Christ in the gospels. Here we have the Lord's distinct promise that the Holy Spirit would reveal all necessary truth to His disciples. Why should not the inspiration of the exalted and glorified Christ through the Holy Spirit be just as authoritative as His teaching in the days of His humiliation? The fact is, during Christ's mundane life the disciples were very dull and full of doubt and timidity; but when, after He was glorified, He poured His Spirit upon them, they were endued with spiritual power, and all their doubts and fears were swept away. Thus the Acts and the Epistles are just as authoritative as the Gospels.

III. The Holy Spirit Refreshes the Memory.

Christ said He would "bring to their remembrance" all that He had taught them. Before the Spirit's baptism they were extremely forgetful. How soon they forgot His foretelling of His death and resurrection! How different after Pentecost! How vividly they recalled everything that Jesus had said to them! Did you ever find Peter quoting from the Old Testament before that day? Now He seems to have the whole Messianic teaching of the Old Testament at the end of his tongue. There are modern instances of men

who could never remember spiritual truth, however often called to their attention, until they received the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

Yes, the Holy Spirit is a great reminder. Sometimes children who have been brought up in godly homes depart for a while from their early teaching; but in after years the Holy Spirit comes to them through the Word, perhaps in some providence, and pours His light into their souls; then the teaching of their parents and pastors revives, and they are won back to Christ; then perhaps the valuable lessons they learned in the catechetical class are recalled, and give them great help and comfort. We do not believe that such early instruction is ever in vain.

IV. Christ and the Holy Spirit Bring Peace.

Strange as it may seem, Christ next changes His speech from the Holy Spirit to Himself. Note His words: "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid. Ye have heard how I said unto you, I go away, and I come unto you."

Christ, therefore, brings peace to the converted soul; it is His own peace—that divine composure which knows no disturbance, because Christ is all-wise and all-powerful. He knows the end from the beginning. He may be sorry because men sin, but it does not disconcert or embarrass Him, because He knows that sin and Satan cannot overcome Him or destroy His sovereignty. He knows that some day "the last enemy shall be overcome," and "He shall reign until He hath put all enemies under His feet." You see, that is why He can confer such a deep peace upon the penitent and believing soul—a peace that "passeth all understanding," and that "flows like a river."

"Prince of peace, control my will;
Bid this struggling heart be still;
Bid my fears and doubtings cease;
Hush my spirit into peace.

"Thou hast bought me with thy blood,
Opened wide the gate of God;
Peace I ask—but peace must be,
Lord, in being one with thee.

"May thy will, not mine, be done;
May thy will and mine be one:
Chase these doubtings from my heart:
Now thy perfect peace impart."

V. Christ's Departure No Loss, But Gain.

There is another great thought in our text that needs to be interpreted. Christ's disciples were greatly troubled on account of what He said about His "departure." They found it hard to be satisfied with the promise of "another Comforter," whom as yet they knew not. Now notice how Christ assured them that His departure would be no loss to them, but, rather, great gain. He said: "If ye loved me, ye would have rejoiced because I go to the Father; for the Father is greater than I."

Is there any doctrinal difficulty here? None whatever. In the days of His humiliation the Son submitted entirely to the Father. He even declared that He taught only what the Father taught Him, and that He did not "speak from Himself." Now, however, the days of His voluntary humiliation would soon be over. He would go back to the Father to be glorified with the glory which He had with the Father before the world was. Hence, during the time of His humiliation, the Father was greater than He; but now He would be exalted to His pristine glory and eternal position, and would again be filled with all the fulness of God, all the power, authority and glory of the Father. As He always was in reality co-equal with God, now He would again exercise His co-equal power and majesty, bearing with Him His human nature to partake of His complete glorification. Paul teaches the same doctrine when he says that in the exalted Christ "dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily." His human nature was glorified by the divine nature. Says Paul again, after He has described Christ's state of humiliation (Phil. 3:9-11): "Wherefore

God also hath highly exalted Him, and given Him a name which is above every name," etc.

Thus we see why His disciples should have rejoiced at their Master's coming exaltation; for only by His being fully glorified by Deity could He confer upon them true and conquering divine power in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Then He—the Spirit—would take of the things of the exalted, heavenly Christ, and would bring them to His disciples.

May the Holy Spirit, poured out once for all upon the Church at Pentecost, abide in every heart, and guide every one into all needed truth!

"The Spirit, by His heavenly breath,
New life creates within;
He quickens sinners from the death
Of trespasses and sin.

The things of Christ the Spirit takes,
And to our heart reveals;
Our bodies He His temple makes,
And our redemption seals.

"Come, Holy Spirit, from above,
With thy celestial fire;
Come, and with flames of zeal and love,
Our hearts and tongues inspire."

THE END

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